

# THE FATAL WEAKNESS

BY

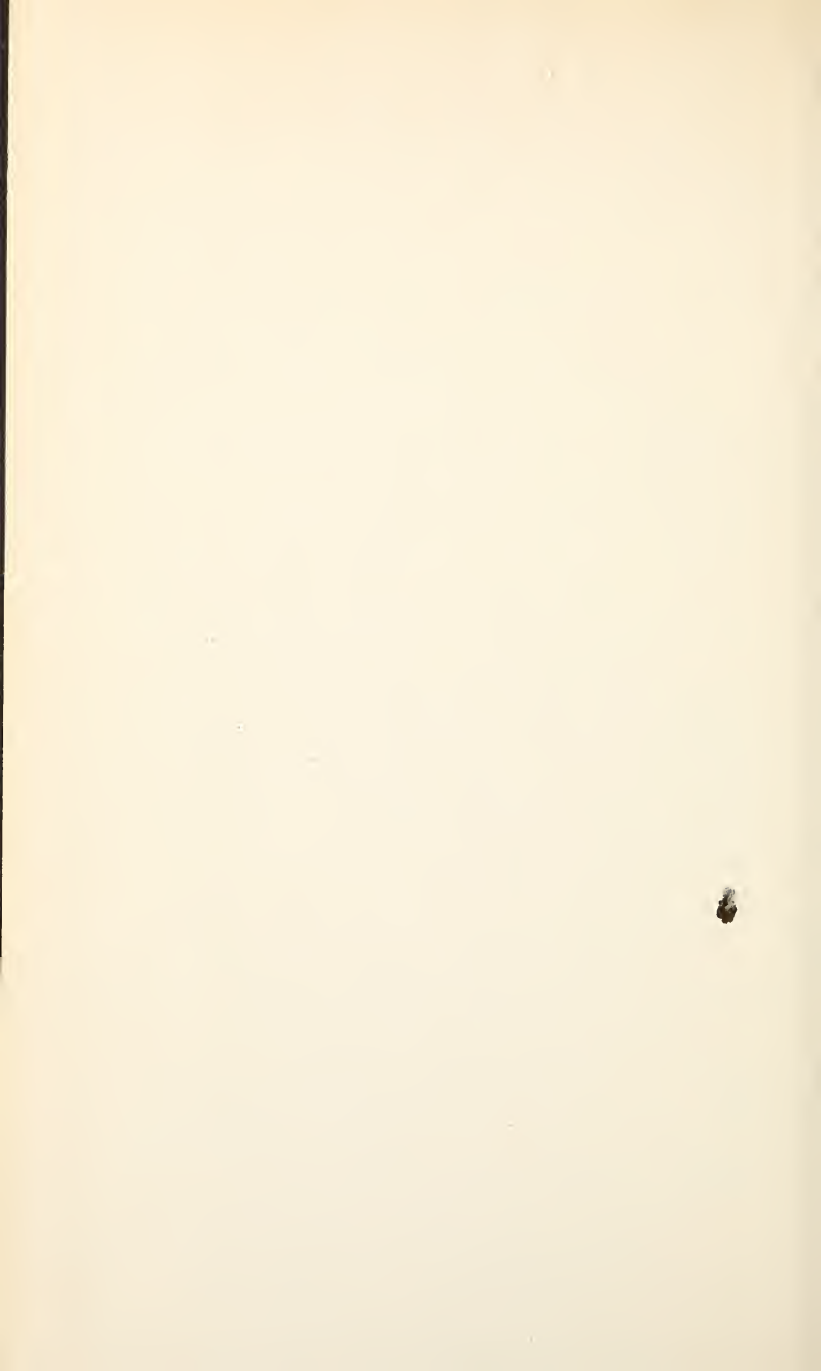
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## THE FATAL WEAKNESS

*Plays By*  
**GEORGE KELLY**

BEHOLD THE BRIDEGROOM

THE SHOW-OFF

REFLECTED GLORY

THE DEEP MRS. SYKES


DAISY MAYME

THE TORCHBEARERS

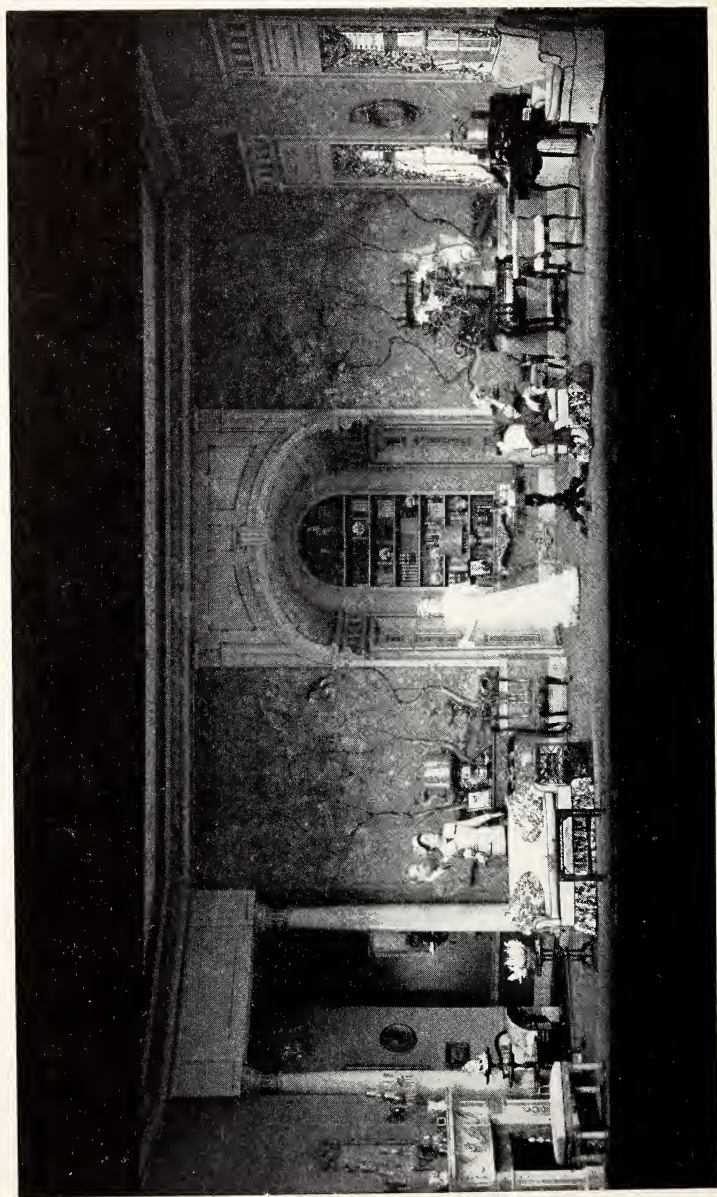
CRAIG'S WIFE

PHILIP GOES FORTH

MAGGIE THE MAGNIFICENT



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# THE FATAL WEAKNESS

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A COMEDY

BY

GEORGE KELLY



SAMUEL FRENCH

NEW YORK

LOS ANGELES

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LONDON

1947

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TO  
*FLORENCE JOHNSON*

11-16-48. a 9 B. - speech





“What fatal weakness hers, that she will hear,  
Alike above the lilting of the dance,  
Or in the crashing of the gods we rear,  
Some hint or fevered whisper of romance.

---

However bitter be the love she knows,  
And buried deep the petaled hopes that fell,  
There is a tristful stirring in the snows  
At ev’ry ringing of a wedding bell.”

(Collected Poems)



THE FATAL WEAKNESS was presented by The Theatre Guild for the first time on any stage at the Shubert Theatre in New Haven, Connecticut, on the night of Thursday, October 17th, 1946: and with the following cast:

MRS. PAUL ESPENSHADE.....	<i>Ina Claire</i>
ANNA.....	<i>Mary Gildea</i>
MRS. MABEL WENTZ.....	<i>Margaret Douglass</i>
PENNY.....	<i>Madge Evans</i>
MR. PAUL ESPENSHADE.....	<i>Howard St. John</i>
VERNON HASSETT.....	<i>John Larson</i>

#### NOTE

The form of the present manuscript is exactly that in which this play was presented at the Royale Theatre, New York.

THE AUTHOR.

## CAST

MRS. PAUL ESPENSHADE

ANNA

MRS. MABEL WENTZ

PENNY

MR. PAUL ESPENSHADE

VERNON HASSETT

The entire action of the play takes place in the apartment  
of Mr. and Mrs. Espenshade.

### ACT ONE

A Saturday afternoon in June, about one o'clock.

### ACT TWO

SCENE ONE: The same day, about six-thirty.

SCENE TWO: Two hours later.

### ACT THREE

SCENE ONE: A Sunday evening in early August.

SCENE TWO: A Saturday afternoon, some months later.

## ACT ONE



## ACT ONE

*The curtain rises on the sitting room in the apartment of MR. AND MRS. PAUL ESPENSHADE on a Saturday afternoon in early June about one o'clock. MRS. ESPENSHADE enters nervously from the left door at the back, with a letter in her hand; and, with a glance toward the archway at the right, hurries over to the desk between the windows at the left and dials a telephone number. As she waits for an answer she steps over to the lower window and glances out; and evidently something down on the sidewalk arrests her; for she peers keenly for a second, and then turns and sets the telephone receiver down again and hurries across above the center table to the archway and presses a button on the upper side.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*speaking into the hallway, and toward the back*)

Are you there, Anna?—Anna!

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Will you come here for a minute, please.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am, I'll be right there. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns impatiently back into the room a few paces and stops, irresolute, looking at the letter in her hand. The telephone begins to buzz, and she looks across at it curiously,*

*and apparently without realizing that she has left the receiver off. The MAID appears.)* Yes, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Listen, Anna,—I just see Mrs. Wentz getting out of a taxicab downstairs, will you be ready to let her in, please.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She'll be up in a minute, and I'm waiting for her.  
[*She turns back into the room again.*]

ANNA (*disappearing into the hallway, towards the front*)

All right, Mrs. Espenshade, I'll wait out here at the door.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

If you will, please. (*She stands looking at the telephone as it continues to buzz; till suddenly she realizes the situation and crosses quickly and picks it up.*) Hello—Yes, I see that it is, I'm sorry. I was just going to call my daughter, and I saw a friend getting out of a taxicab downstairs here, and I was afraid the maid might not hear the buzzer, and I was particularly anxious to—  
[*She hangs up and turns away; and a buzzer sounds in the hallway. She starts up towards the console piece at the right of the alcove at the back to get a handkerchief from her pocketbook, then moves forward at the right to the wall-mirror over the mantelpiece.*]

MRS. WENTZ (*outside*)

Hello, Anna.

ANNA

How do you do, Mrs. Wentz.



MRS. WENTZ

Isn't this a lovely day.

ANNA

Oh, isn't it beautiful.

MRS. WENTZ

I think we can use one or two of them, though, don't you?

ANNA

Oh, I should say so.

[*The front door is heard to close. And MRS. ESPENSHADE turns from the glass and goes up to the console again to put her handkerchief back in the bag, then turns and faces the archway, waiting for MRS. WENTZ.*]

MRS. WENTZ

Is Mrs. Espenshade here in the sitting room?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I'm right here, Mabel, come in.

[*MRS. WENTZ appears in the arch.*]

MRS. WENTZ

Well!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Hello, dear, come in. (*The MAID passes the archway, going towards the back; and MRS. ESPENSHADE repeats the invitation by a flipping of her index finger. MRS. WENTZ moves towards the center of the room, a little mystified, and MRS. ESPENSHADE moves to the archway to look after the MAID.*) I hope you haven't put yourself out, coming over here this way. But I did want to see you as soon as possible.

MRS. WENTZ

But I expected at least to find you on your death-bed.  
[*She turns and looks back at* MRS. ESPENSHADE.]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I know—I must have sounded rather frightening. But I *was* upset.

MRS. WENTZ

What's the matter?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming back*)

Come over here to the window, I want to show you something. (*She crosses above her and down to the chair at the extreme left; and* MRS. WENTZ *turns all the way round to her right and trails after her, more mystified than ever.*) Have you your glasses with you?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, I have them here in my bag.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I just want you to sit down here and read this; and let me know what you think of it.

MRS. WENTZ (*taking the letter*)

What is it?

[*She proceeds to sit down and get out the glasses.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't *know*, Mabel, *what* it is, any more than you do. And I'm not even allowing myself to think. Because, of course, there may be nothing to it at all. It simply came in the ten o'clock mail this morning and I called you right away. (*She goes up towards the middle of the room to glance toward the hallway.*) He generally gets home

here, you know, about this time on Saturday. (*coming forward again and across below the table towards MRS. WENTZ.*) And Penny nearly always wanders over right after lunch, while the girl is walking the child. So I *did* want to see you before either of them got here. I was just going to call Penny when I saw you getting out of the taxicab—to see if *she* knew anything about it. I don't suppose she does. And she probably wouldn't admit it even if she did: so I'm glad I didn't get her. (*She crosses up to the center again.*) She's always defended him, you know,—at least where I'm concerned. (*coming forward and across below the couch to the mantelpiece.*) Poor Papa! That's all you ever *get* out of her. You'd think somebody'd been persecuting him all his life. Nothing at all about me. (*crossing back again, above the couch to the center of the room.*) I wonder what she'll think of Poor Papa now. (*coming forward again and across below the table to MRS. WENTZ.*) But he never fooled my grandmother. Oh, no! She knew him even then: and it's over twenty-five years ago. I remember distinctly what she said to me the first time I ever introduced him to her. She said—

MRS. WENTZ (*looking up, and very casually*)

What are you saying about your grandmother, dear?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, it isn't important, I was simply remembering something! I want to know about that letter.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, what about it?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't *know*, Mabel,—*what* about it: that's what I want *you* to tell *me*! Do you think it's genuine? (MRS. WENTZ

*looks at the letter again.*) Because, you know, it could quite easily be just some jealous person trying to upset my peace of mind. (MRS. WENTZ *makes a slight movement of her head in the negative.*) But you don't think it's that?

MRS. WENTZ

No.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You mean you think it's perfectly honest?

MRS. WENTZ (*taking off the glasses*)

Well, I think the fact that she doesn't say that she's telling you "as a friend" is suggestive.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning towards the back*)

That's what *I* think.

MRS. WENTZ

I'm always a little suspicious of women that tell you "as a friend" that you're losing your husband.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But beyond anything that she actually says there, I have a feeling somehow or other that the thing is sincere. I mean, that she's genuinely concerned: and just feels that *somebody* ought to tell me,—(*moving forward and across below the table and right up towards the back again.*) before this *fool* makes a show of me,—and of himself and everybody else.

MRS. WENTZ

Now, calm down, darling, before you make a show of *yourself*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, but the *duplicity* of it, Mabel!

MRS. WENTZ

I know.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing down to her*)

And the cunning of him,—that's what hurts me. A woman doctor! So that he'd always have the excuse, you know, that he was simply a patient of hers, in case I ever heard anything.

MRS. WENTZ

That's the reason I tell you you've got to go slow in this thing, Ollie,—or he'll make you look foolish. I mean, you *can't* just accuse him of going to see a woman doctor.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But she's a woman osteopath, Mabel!

MRS. WENTZ

Even so.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It says so there in the letter.

MRS. WENTZ

But it also says she's a *medical* doctor.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away and towards the back*)

But I'll bet her specialty is the osteopathy.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, whether it is or not, she's a doctor. And he can always say that there was something the matter with him, and that *she* was recommended.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming down towards the center table again*)

The blatancy of it!

MRS. WENTZ

So sit down there, now, and let's decide what you're going to do about it before he walks in on you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*sitting at the left of the center table*)

What those women doctors have to answer for!

MRS. WENTZ

It's nearly a quarter past one.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

If he should get here before you leave,—just say you were over this way on an errand and dropped in.

MRS. WENTZ

All right. Now, listen,—it says here that she's a very *good* doctor.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

The better they are the worse they are, my dear, I'm telling you.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, I mean, she must be pretty well known.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I wouldn't trust one of them any more than I'd trust a trained nurse. And you know what I think of them.

MRS. WENTZ

And I have an idea that this woman lives up there somewhere in your old neighborhood.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Which woman?

MRS. WENTZ

The woman that wrote this letter. I think that's how she happens to see all this. I think she must live somewhere where she can see this doctor's house or apartment from her windows, and sees *him* coming there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You think the doctor lives up that way, too?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes; I think they both live up that way.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What makes you think so, Mabel? I mean, is there something there in that letter?

MRS. WENTZ

No, I don't think so.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Then, what makes you think it?

MRS. WENTZ

I couldn't tell you, darling, *what* makes me think it: it's just something I think.

[*She looks at the letter again.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But that letter does sound perfectly honest to you, doesn't it?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes.



MRS. ESPENSHADE

I mean, there's nothing at all gossipy about it?

MRS. WENTZ

No; that's the reason I think she must be actually seeing something herself.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

So do I.

MRS. WENTZ

And I think she must be seeing it from where she lives,—because she speaks of the frequency of it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It's probably been going on for years, you know.

MRS. WENTZ

And she must be elderly,—to have known your father as well as she says she did.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I can't think who she could *be*! I've been racking my brain here all morning.

MRS. WENTZ

Don't you know any old woman that knew your father very well?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, my dear, I know millions of them. But old women always say they knew your father very well; and half the time they don't even know who *you* are.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, that's the reason I think she must be seeing them



from her home rather than in some public place. I mean, the fact that she's old.

*[She puts her glasses in her bag.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Isn't it terrible, Mabel! And *I* sitting here all these years believing everything he told me.

MRS. WENTZ (*getting out a cigarette-holder*)

But you *haven't* been sitting here, dear, so now don't start *that*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rising furiously*)

Well, I *could* have been sitting here, as far as *he's* concerned!

*[She moves across below the table and up towards the back.]*

MRS. WENTZ

You're out every time I call you,—playing Bridge or *something*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, if I am, I'm at least not doing what *he's* been doing. (*more or less as an afterthought, and speaking over her right shoulder as she continues on up to the console.*)

And *he'd* very likely be out playing Bridge himself, or some other kind of game, only that he can't look at the spots on the cards anymore. For he played plenty when he *could* look at them.

*[She fumbles in her bag for her handkerchief.]*

MRS. WENTZ

Well, what does it matter *what* he played, darling, that isn't important.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I don't think you should defend him, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

I'm *not* defending him at all.

*[She lights her cigarette.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think there's some sort of duty, or moral obligation in this kind of thing.

*[She moves over towards the chair at the left of the center table.]*

MRS. WENTZ (*settling back in her chair*)

Maybe there is; but it doesn't seem to have had much effect. So sit down there, now, I want to ask you something.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'd like to hear *him*, if he heard any such thing about *me*.

MRS. WENTZ

Is this the first time you've ever heard anything about this?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to her*)

Why, certainly it's the first time I've ever heard of it, Mabel! I never even *dreamed* of such a thing till I opened that letter here this morning.

MRS. WENTZ

But you had heard of middle-aged men flirting around with other women?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But why should *he* be flirting around with them, Mabel?

MRS. WENTZ

I don't know, dear.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I mean, what *cause* have I given him!

MRS. WENTZ

They don't need any cause, Ollie—they're probably the cause of it themselves.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *sits down; then looks suddenly at*  
MRS. WENTZ.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

*You've* never heard anything about him, have you?

MRS. WENTZ

No, as a matter of fact, I haven't.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Then, why do you ask me, Mabel?

MRS. WENTZ

Well, I was just wondering how long this has been going on.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I haven't the faintest idea,—any more than *you* have. But according to that letter there, it's evidently been going on for months.

MRS. WENTZ

And haven't you ever *noticed* anything?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not a solitary thing in this world. (*There is a slight pause; and* MRS. WENTZ *sits looking at her.*) Of course,

I have suspected him from time to time, like any other woman; but not because of anything in particular.

MRS. WENTZ

Hasn't he been doing a lot of *looking* at himself lately in the looking-glass, or anything like that?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, I can't say that he has.

MRS. WENTZ

Because they usually do begin a lot of that kind of thing, you know, as soon as they start—this kind of thing.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Of course, he's everlastingly talking about his hair,—and wondering if it isn't going back further here at the sides. And, *naturally*, it's going back further; he'll be fifty-two the twenty-seventh of next April: it's time it started to go back if it's ever going to. (*She glances nervously toward the hallway.*) I suppose he'd kill me if he thought I ever told anybody he was fifty-two. But that's what he is—fifty-two! He's just six years older than I am—six years and two months.

MRS. WENTZ

What about whistling, Ollie?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

About what, dear?

MRS. WENTZ

Whistling. Does he do much of that?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes he does, Mabel; (MRS. WENTZ *nods her recognition of the symptom.*) he has me nearly out of my mind

around here sometimes. But the thing I've noticed about him lately more than anything else, is a funny little *skip* he gives occasionally,—(*This appears to be the particular sign that MRS. WENTZ has been waiting for, for she lifts her cigarette conclusively and turns to dispose of some ashes.*) as he crosses a room.

[MRS. WENTZ looks at her quickly.]

MRS. WENTZ

For no reason at all, you mean?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes:—(*That seems to settle it for MRS. WENTZ; for she nods her head definitively and continues with the disposition of the ashes.*) it's the funniest thing you've ever seen in your life. He just gives a little *leap*, as though he's stepped on a spring or something.

MRS. WENTZ (*leaning back in her chair again*)

Well, there's one thing more I'd like to ask you, Ollie. (MRS. ESPENSHADE attends.) Have you noticed anything about the *time* he does things? I mean, the time he comes home, or goes out, or does any—

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, I can't say that I have. I mean, it's just about what it's always been,—at least as far back as I can remember. I haven't been seeing very much of him in the evenings these last few years, unless we went out to dinner or had people in. And on Saturdays he's generally stopped here for a few minutes on the way out to Brookside, if the weather was good; and if it wasn't, he went on over to the Riverview to play handball. He thinks it keeps his waist down, you know. He's as vain as a peacock about his figure. (MRS. WENTZ breaks into an audible

*little laugh.*) Oh, you have no idea, Mabel!—you should hear him here sometimes. I positively think he believes he looks exactly as he did when he was twenty.

MRS. WENTZ (*very casually*)

Well, very few men realize what they look like, dear.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And, of course, we *may* be doing him a complete injustice. I mean, a letter like that could be just a piece of mischief. Because I *do* think he spends a lot of time over there at the Riverview; they have a lot of those exercising machines over there, you know: and he's always been a great bender and kicker ever since I've known him.

MRS. WENTZ (*getting rid of more ashes*)

Well, I tell you, darling,—I don't want to appear cynical; but I do think it's just as well for a woman to give herself the benefit of the doubt in a thing of this kind,—I really do.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, that's what I'm saying, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

I mean, the fact that she doesn't *hear* that her husband is carrying on, doesn't mean that he isn't. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *looks at her.*) And if he is, I think the sooner she finds out about it the better.

[*There is a slight pause; and* MRS. ESPENSHADE'S *eyes wander away off.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But don't you think there's something very tragic about *finding* out about it, Mabel? (MRS. WENTZ *lifts her shoulders.*) I mean, after nearly twenty-eight years?



MRS. WENTZ

I think that depends entirely on the circumstances, Ollie. I didn't have half that, and it was plenty.

*[She presses the fire out of her cigarette.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But if they've been happy years, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ (*getting up*)

No: I think twenty-eight years is too long for any two people to put up with each other. (*crossing over above the center table.*) And how they do it is one of the mysteries of my life. And how they go back into it once they're out of it, is a bigger mystery. I must get a drink, I'm dying.

*[She continues towards the hallway.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*abstractedly*)

Just press that button there,—Anna's right there somewhere.

MRS. WENTZ (*pressing the button*)

I don't know what made me so thirsty today: I've been drinking water all morning.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Wouldn't you rather have something else than water?

MRS. WENTZ

No, really, that's all I want.

*[She moves back towards the center of the room, returning her cigarette-holder to the pocketbook.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning, rather anxiously, and lowering her voice*)

Well, listen, Mabel,—what am I going to *do* about this?

You haven't *told* me anything yet; and he'll be home here any minute.

MRS. WENTZ (*stepping to the right of the table*)

What *can* you do, Ollie,—till you know something.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, how am I ever going to *know* it unless I *do* something!

MRS. WENTZ

*I'll* find out something for you,—as soon as I can get hold of Minerva Nichols.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

As soon as you get hold of whom?

[*The MAID appears in the archway.*

ANNA

Did you want something, Mrs. Espenshade?

[*MRS. WENTZ moves smoothly across above the table towards the upper window.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, yes, Anna. Will you bring Mrs. Wentz a glass of water, please.

ANNA (*starting out*)

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. WENTZ

Just plain water, Anna.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Wouldn't you like a bit of ice or something in it?

[*ANNA pauses.*



MRS. WENTZ

No, just plain; I don't like it too cold.

ANNA

Would *you* like a glass, too, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rising, and crossing below the table towards the mantelpiece mirror*)

No, thanks, Anna, just one glass: I don't want any.

ANNA (*withdrawing*)

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. WENTZ (*putting her bag on the desk, and trying to make conversation till the MAID is out of ear-shot*)

How is it you're not out this lovely day, Ollie?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*watching the retreating figure of the MAID*)

I *was* going to go out later in the day,—but—

MRS. WENTZ (*moving to the left of the table*)

It's perfectly beautiful out.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*stepping quickly over to the right of the center table*)

Who is it that you say you're going to get hold of?

MRS. WENTZ

Minerva Nichols. She's a friend of mine that lives up there where *you* used to live.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Do *I* know her?

MRS. WENTZ

No; but *she* knows everything that's going on in the world. And if she doesn't, she knows somebody that does.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, you won't actually *tell* her about this, will you?

MRS. WENTZ

No, of course not.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I mean, there's no point in saying anything till we're sure.

MRS. WENTZ

You don't have to tell her anything: you just give her a hint. And she has her own car and absolutely *nothing* else to do.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And do you think she'll do it for you?

MRS. WENTZ

Of *course* she'll do it for me; she does it for everybody.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, how will you tell her, Mabel?—I mean, so that she won't know what you're talking about?

MRS. WENTZ

I'm trying to think.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing above the center table towards the left*)

Because, of course, I'll simply *die* if anybody finds out about it.

MRS. WENTZ

Oh, don't be silly, Ollie, she probably knows all about it already.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming forward at the left*)

She probably does: the wife is always the last one in the world to hear about this kind of thing. (*She glances around the chair where MRS. WENTZ had been sitting. Then she turns suddenly to MRS. WENTZ.*) Have you that letter there that I gave you, Mabel?

MRS. WENTZ (*oblivious of the question*)

I tell you what I think I'll do.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What?

MRS. WENTZ (*crossing quickly, above MRS. ESPENSHADE, to the telephone*)

I think I'll call *her* up right now and see if she's in.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Do you think she *will* be?

MRS. WENTZ

She might.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I mean, on account of it being Saturday.

MRS. WENTZ

What time is it?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Just half-past one.

MRS. WENTZ

She's generally home for luncheon. (*turning to MRS. ESPENSHADE; and, with a glance toward the hallway, lowering her voice to a very confidential key.*) And if she is, I'll ask her to get in her car and go over and park

somewhere where she can see the front of *my* apartment. And I'll stay *here* till *he* gets here. And when he's leaving, if he's going out to the Club,—I'll ask him if he can drop me on the way out. He can go out there that way, you know.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Of course.

MRS. WENTZ

And I'll tell *her* to watch till she sees *me* get out of a car; and then to follow it and see if it goes out to the Country Club. And if it doesn't, to see where it does go and let me know. And then I can call you up.

[*She turns and sits at the desk.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What time will you call me, Mabel, have you any idea?

MRS. WENTZ (*getting out her glasses*)

Well, as soon as I hear from *her*: there's no point in calling you *before* that.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I mean, I'd like to *be* here when you call.

MRS. WENTZ

Are you going out some place?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I have to go over to a wedding at Saint Stephen's this afternoon. And I don't think I'll get back here much before six.

MRS. WENTZ (*reaching for the telephone*)

Whose wedding *is* it over there this afternoon?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*looking toward the hallway*)

I don't think you know them, Mabel: but they're *very* old friends of mine. And I think I *should* put in an appearance.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, then, I'll call you some time after six.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

All right, I'll be back by that time, I'm sure.

MRS. WENTZ (*trying to recall the telephone number*)

Now, let me see.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*stepping forward to MRS. WENTZ's right*)

Oh, and listen, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

What?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Does this woman that you're going to call know Paul?

MRS. WENTZ

No, I don't think so.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I mean, by sight?

MRS. WENTZ

No, I don't think she knows either of you by sight. And I don't think *he* knows *her*, either. That's the reason it's easier for *her* to trail him than me. Now, let me see.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Do you know her number?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, it's the same as yours only the Exchange is Belmont three instead of Arlington four. And the last two numbers are the same as mine only turned around. I mean, the six is a two and the two is a six. That's how I always remember it.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *crosses to a point above the center table, and the MAID enters with a glass of water on a small silver tray.* MRS. WENTZ *begins to dial.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Do you want this water now, Mabel?

MRS. WENTZ

No, I'll get it in a minute.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Just leave it here on the table, Anna.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. WENTZ (*still absorbed in the dialing*)

Thank you very much, Anna.

ANNA (*withdrawing*)

You're very welcome I'm sure, Mrs. Wentz.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *takes a step or two towards the hallway to glance cautiously after the MAID.*

MRS. WENTZ

Hello?—Hello, Mildred, this is Mrs. Wentz. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *returns to a point behind MRS. WENTZ and listens breathlessly.*) I'm very well, Mildred, how are *you*?—

That's good.—Is Mrs. Nichols there?—If you will, please. (*She half turns to MRS. ESPENSHADE and says voicelessly.*) She's there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Is she married, Mabel? This Nichols woman?

MRS. WENTZ

She doesn't know, dear, whether she is or not. I'll tell you about it in a minute.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I mean, she's not a widow?

MRS. WENTZ

No, her husband's married in Montana. She doesn't think *I* know it, but I do. (*turning suddenly to the telephone, and with quite a change of tone.*) Hello, Minnie, how are you?—That's good.—Well, I'm a little disturbed at the moment, darling, that's the reason I called you. (*She makes a little sound of amusement.*) No, but I think a friend of mine is giving his wife a bit of a run-around and it's making me mad.—Well, I think he imagines he's putting it over on *me*, too, and I can't bear it. (*with a significant change of tone.*) I can't tell you now, dear, his wife is sitting right outside this booth here. (*She looks at MRS. ESPENSHADE, who cautiously tiptoes forward to the chair at the extreme left and sits down.*) Hum-hum.—Yes, we've just had lunch together.—Oh, sure, she's a friend of mine, too: we're waiting here now for him to pick us up and drive us home. He *was* to have taken *her* to some kind of rose exhibit this afternoon; but she tells me he telephoned just before she left the house that he'd forgotten about a *golf match* that he was sup-



posed to play in this afternoon.—Oh, every word, my dear, she'd be furious if you even suggested— (*She laughs faintly.*) Mine, too. And that's where you come in, darling.—Well, I was wondering how busy you're going to be this afternoon, Minerva. (*She looks significantly at MRS. ESPENSHADE.*) Well, that's wonderful; I'll tell you why. *He's* going to stop for us here in a few minutes on his way home; and he'll be dropping me at my house in about a half an hour, I should say. And I was wondering if you could get in your car and go over there and park somewhere where you can see the front of my place: and wait there till you see *me* get out of a car. And then follow it and see if it does go out to the Brookside Country Club. Oh, no, darling! Because if he's going to play in a match out there he's apt to be there all afternoon. Well, if you want to, Minnie; but I have no idea *where* he might be going if he's not going there:—you might have to trail him all over the city. Well, suit yourself, dear; only I'm afraid if he got an idea that he was being followed, he'd just stop and go into a church somewhere; that's what men do, you know, when they think somebody is trailing them.—Yes, I think that'd be better, Minnie. And then you can call *me* up; I'll be home all afternoon. All right, dear, that'll be fine. And I'll see you later. Good-bye, dear. (*She hangs up smoothly and gets up, crossing to a point above the center table.*) She'll go over there right away; she says she has absolutely nothing to do all afternoon.

[*She puts her purse on the table.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rising and following her*)

Why didn't you ask her if she knew any woman doctor up that way, Mabel?



MRS. WENTZ

Oh, don't be silly, Ollie! She'd have the whole thing figured out before you'd finish asking her.

*[She picks up the glass of water and drinks.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What was it she was suggesting, that she wait outside the Country Club till Paul came out?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes: she doesn't understand anything about golf, you know.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing above her*)

Why, those matches last for a week sometimes.

MRS. WENTZ

That wouldn't bother *her*,—if she wanted to find out something.

*[She drinks again.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*at MRS. WENTZ's right*)

What was it you were saying, about her not knowing whether she was married or not?

MRS. WENTZ

Why, her husband got married out west somewhere before his divorce from *her* was final. And *she* found out about it some way and sent him a congratulatory wire,—with charges. And he's been paying them ever since. (*There is a quick double toot of an automobile horn out at the left. And MRS. ESPENSHADE, with a significant gesture, steps immediately forward and across below the table to the lower window and looks keenly out.*) What's the matter?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think that's he now.

MRS. WENTZ

How do you know?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

That was the horn of his car that just tooted. He always toots that way to let me know he's coming up.

MRS. WENTZ (*setting the glass down*)

I wonder where he learned *that*.

[*She picks up her purse.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, he's getting out. (*She turns quickly from the window and hurries across and up to the console to get her bag.*) He always parks the car across the Avenue there when he's going out to the Club. Do I look as though I'd been crying?

MRS. WENTZ (*getting her handkerchief from the purse*)

No.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Because I wouldn't please him to let him see that I'd shed a tear *over* him.

[*She gets her handkerchief out and dabs her eyes.*]

MRS. WENTZ (*moving across below the couch to the fireplace mirror*)

You can always say you've been bathing your eyes.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving across to the table*)

And I'm *not* shedding any tears over *him*, I can promise you.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, what *are* you shedding them over, Ollie?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I think a woman's *pride* ought to be of *some* consideration after twenty-eight years. And so do you, Mabel Wentz, if you'd admit it.

*[She puts her purse down and moves forward around the chair at the left of the center table. And MRS. WENTZ turns from the mirror and looks at her.]*

MRS. WENTZ

I *do* admit it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*sitting down*)

Paul Espenshade wasn't the only man that ever looked at *me*.

MRS. WENTZ (*drifting back to the center of the room*)

I think her pride should be so hurt that she would disdain to include him in any of her future arrangements. That's what *I* did in a similar circumstance: (*She pauses; and then continues across above the table to the upper end of the desk.*) and that's why I can tell of many lands. And that's what *you'll* do if you've got any sense. *[She puts her bag down.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't think it's quite the same with you as it is with me.

MRS. WENTZ

I'm more self-sufficient I suppose.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, you know you *are* more capable than I am, Mabel, you know that as well as I do.

MRS. WENTZ (*coming forward at the left*)

I don't think we know much about *what* we are till something like this happens to us. But you've been saying for years that you wish you could pick up and go the way *I* do whenever you took the notion. But you couldn't leave Paul. (*turning away, to the lower window.*) Well, according to that letter he's been leaving *you* for some time. And this is your chance to try it on *him*, if you'll only take it.

[*There is a slight pause.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I feel just like a ship without a sail. (MRS. WENTZ *makes a little sound of amusement and turns back to her.*) No, really, I do, Mabel. I mean, this thing has hit me so suddenly, I'm just not prepared for it.

MRS. WENTZ

You're in a very enviable position, Ollie, according to my thinking.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't know how you can say such a thing.

MRS. WENTZ

You've got your own money and your daughter is well married.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And what good is that if I haven't affection, Mabel. I'm a nature that needs that.

MRS. WENTZ

You have a daughter, haven't you? (MRS. ESPENSHADE *makes a little sound and movement of deprecation.*) And

a grandchild?—(*She groans.*) And you'll very likely have several more as time goes on.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I think it's better for a woman if she can get what affection she needs from her husband.

MRS. WENTZ (*turning to the desk chair*)

If that's what she wants. But I'm afraid I'd be a little suspicious of the affection of a husband after twenty-eight years. (*She sits down.*) I'd be inclined to think he'd been trying it with everybody else and couldn't make a go of it.

[*A door closes out at the right.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rising, and with a significant gesture*)

There he is! (*She crosses below the table and up towards the hallway.*) Don't forget to say that you were over this way on an errand of some kind.

MRS. WENTZ

And don't you say anything about that letter. Or anything else, till we know something.

[*MRS. ESPENSHADE makes a gesture of understanding and then stands peering cautiously into the hallway toward the front. And MRS. WENTZ picks up her purse from the desk and gets out a cigarette.*]

ESPENSHADE (*outside*)

Hello, Anna, where did you get all the pretty roses?

ANNA

Why, Mrs. Espenshade ordered them yesterday afternoon when she was out.

ESPENSHADE

They're very pretty. Is Mrs. Espenshade out now?

ANNA

No, Sir, she's in. Mrs. Wentz is here, too.

ESPENSHADE

Oh, fine!

*[A door is heard to close; and MRS. ESPENSHADE tiptoes back a bit towards MRS. WENTZ.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*lowering her voice*)

He's gone into the study—he'll be in in a minute. He was asking Anna about those roses out there.

*[She returns to the archway.]*

MRS. WENTZ

They're wonderful-looking roses.

*[She lights the cigarette.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming cautiously towards MRS. WENTZ again*)

The city could be full of them, you know, and he'd never send *me* one. And I suppose he's sending *boxes* of them to *her*. (MRS. WENTZ *tries to silence her with a little gesture; but MRS. ESPENSHADE simply turns impatiently towards the back.*) But what a fool I've been, Mabel! If I'd had the sense I was born with I might have known there was something going on. (*crossing quickly to MRS. WENTZ.*) By the way, where's that letter, Mabel? You'd better give it to me before *he* comes in.

MRS. WENTZ

I did give it to you, Ollie.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You didn't, darling: you were *going* to, but we got talking about something else.



MRS. WENTZ

You're sure you didn't put it back in the bosom of your dress?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, it's in your pocketbook there; you had it when you were sitting there.

*[She indicates the chair below the lower window.]*

MRS. WENTZ

Well, I don't *see* it if it is.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, look in the bosom of *your* dress, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ (*rising, with a touch of annoyance, and shaking her skirt and jacket*)

This dress *has* no bosom! How could I put it in there!

ESPENSHADE (*approaching, in the hallway*)

I hear that Mabel Wentz is in our midst!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You can give it to me later; you must have it there somewhere.

*[She turns and sits at the left of the table, and MRS. WENTZ resumes her chair at the desk,—both trying to appear as casual as possible. And ESPENSHADE suddenly appears in the door, in a very becoming light suit, and wearing a white carnation.]*

ESPENSHADE

And there she is—looking exactly like a June bride!

MRS. WENTZ (*returning the pocketbook to the desk*)

Why, Mr. Espenshade!

ESPENSHADE (*raising his finger and starting across the room*)

I knew you were here by the curious fluttering of my heart as I approached the premises. (*patting her right arm with his right hand and patting her on the back with his left.*) How are you, Mabel? I'm glad to see you.  
[*He crosses to his wife.*]

MRS. WENTZ

You just said I looked like a June bride.

ESPENSHADE (*laying his right hand on his wife's right shoulder*)

So you do. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *cringes under his touch.*)  
Isn't that right, Ollie? Doesn't Mabel look absolutely blooming?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I was just telling her.

MRS. WENTZ

I'd hoped you were going to say I looked like a June rose.

ESPENSHADE (*laughing lightly, as he crosses back again to the upper side of the desk*)

I didn't know there was any difference, really.

MRS. WENTZ

Only that one is pretty and the other is usually pretty dumb.

ESPENSHADE (*fumbling among the papers on the desk*)

Ah, your cynicism does not deceive us, Mabel! You're on somebody's trail this afternoon,—(MRS. ESPENSHADE *shifts her eyes quickly to MRS. WENTZ.*) with all that green and white business.



[*He indicates the green and white trimming on MRS. WENTZ's hat.*

MRS. WENTZ (*over her left shoulder*)

Am I in your way?

ESPENSHADE

Don't as much as stir, Mabel; I'm only seeking an opportunity to be near you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*with a touch of anxiety*)

What are you looking for?

ESPENSHADE

Wasn't there any mail for *me* this morning?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Did you look in the study?

ESPENSHADE

Yes, I was just in there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, that's where it'd be, if there *was* any.

[*Her eyes sweep the desk and down along the floor to the chair near the lower window. Then she reassures herself by glancing along the floor and under the table beside her.*

ESPENSHADE (*turning from the desk, and reaching into his pocket for a cigarette, as he comes forward to a point between the two ladies*)

Yes, sir, I think you two are up to *something*—sitting in here this lovely afternoon. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *has an impulse to risk another glance at MRS. WENTZ, but restrains herself.*) You *have* a cigarette, Mabel?

[MRS. WENTZ *flips her cigarette in her fingers to show him that she has.*

MRS. WENTZ

I was waiting for *you*, as a matter of fact.

ESPENSHADE

Now, Mabel!

[*He crosses to the table to light his cigarette.*

MRS. WENTZ

Your wife says that you generally go out to Brookside on Saturday afternoon if the weather is good, and I thought you might drop me at my house.

ESPENSHADE

I can think of nothing more exciting.

MRS. WENTZ

You can go out that way, can't you?

ESPENSHADE (*disposing of the match-stem on the table tray and moving forward and across below the couch to the mantelpiece mirror*)

Of course. Have you had your lunch?

MRS. WENTZ

I don't eat lunch.

ESPENSHADE

How about *you*, Ollie?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I've already had something.

ESPENSHADE (*appraising himself critically in the glass*)

Well, if you'll just wait till I've had a glass of milk and a sandwich, Mabel, I'll whisk you to your very door.

MRS. WENTZ

There's no hurry.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Does Mrs. DeShon know you're home?

ESPENSHADE

Yes, she's getting it now.

*[He leans closer to the glass, to check the recession of the hair above the left temple; and MRS. ESPENSHADE looks significantly at MRS. WENTZ; then turns and picks up her bag from the table to get her handkerchief.]*

MRS. WENTZ

That's a very good-looking suit on *you*, Mr. Espenshade.

ESPENSHADE

You like that suit, Mabel?

MRS. WENTZ

Very much. It's new, isn't it?

ESPENSHADE *(turning to his right and crossing above the couch to the center of the room)*

I got it a week ago last Saturday. It's one of the new summer weights.

MRS. WENTZ

I *thought* I hadn't seen it before.

ESPENSHADE

You don't think it's too light?

MRS. WENTZ

Not for this kind of weather.

ESPENSHADE

No, I mean, the color? (*She shakes her head negatively.*)  
You don't think it makes me look heavier?

MRS. WENTZ

I don't think so.

ESPENSHADE (*coming forward to cross below the couch to the mirror again*)

Certain shades of gray'll do that, you know.

MRS. WENTZ

It makes your *hair* look darker.

ESPENSHADE (*turning, just below the coffee-table, and with a wide gesture to his wife as he comes back a step or two towards her*)

Now, do you hear *that*, Ollie! That's exactly what *I* said.  
And *she* said I was only imagining it.

MRS. WENTZ

No, I think it does.

ESPENSHADE (*crossing between the couch and the coffee-table to the glass again*)

I noticed that the first time I tried it on: my hair reminded me of the way it *used* to look.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, it does look about the way it used to look, doesn't it?

ESPENSHADE (*deprecatingly*)

Ho, ho!

MRS. WENTZ

*I* can't see much difference.

ESPENSHADE

You are seeing me through a glass darkly, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, I mean, outside of a bit of gray here and there.

ESPENSHADE

No, there's more to it than that.

MRS. WENTZ

That's all *I* can see.

ESPENSHADE (*looking closely at the hair above the left temple again*)

It's going back further here at the sides by the minute.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *gestures deftly* to MRS. WENTZ.]

MRS. WENTZ

Well, don't you think we're all going a little further back somewhere?

[*He laughs.*]

ESPENSHADE

I suppose so.

MRS. WENTZ (*turning smoothly to pick up her purse from the desk*)

You've got to expect that when you're getting into your forties.

[ANNA *appears in the archway, from the front.*]

ANNA

Your lunch is ready, Mr. Espenshade.

ESPENSHADE (*turning towards her*)

All right, Anna, I'll be right out.

[*He crosses at the back* to MRS. WENTZ.]

ANNA (*withdrawing, towards the back*)

Yes, Sir.

ESPENSHADE

Well, I'll tell you a little secret, Mabel, if you'll promise not to tell anybody.

MRS. WENTZ

What?

[*He glances with a mock cautiousness over his right shoulder toward the hallway.*]

ESPENSHADE (*speaking confidentially*)

I'm getting so deep into my forties that there's no fun in it.

[*He turns and starts for the doorway. And MRS. ESPENSHADE lifts her eyes to Heaven, as she turns to put her bag back on the table.*]

MRS. WENTZ

I don't believe you.

ESPENSHADE

I'm telling you.

[*MRS. ESPENSHADE looks after him: and just as she does, he executes the funny little skip that she mentioned earlier; and then, breaking into a rather jaunty little whistle, he careens through the archway and towards the back. Immediately he gives the little skip, MRS. ESPENSHADE thrusts her left arm and hand behind her in the general direction of MRS. WENTZ and wiggles her fingers. But MRS. WENTZ is doing precisely the same thing with her right arm and hand, in an effort to attract MRS. ESPENSHADE's attention. Then MRS. ESPENSHADE gets up and starts across below the table and up towards the hallway.*]

*She pauses half-way and looks back over her right shoulder at MRS. WENTZ.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*lowering her voice*)

Do you see what I mean, Mabel? (MRS. WENTZ closes her eyes and inclines her head understandingly. And MRS. ESPENSHADE tries to imitate the little skip as she continues on to the arch. She looks cautiously after her husband, and then hurries across at the back to MRS. WENTZ.) That's been going on for about six months now. And I've been wondering whether there might be something the matter with him.

MRS. WENTZ

I don't think so, dear.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But, I mean, I've often heard that men that do a lot of exercising the way he does, are apt to have what they call concussions, that they don't even know about.

MRS. WENTZ

I know.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And they say they can actually affect their movements.

MRS. WENTZ

But that isn't what's affecting his.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, what do you think it is, Mabel?

MRS. WENTZ

I think it's his age, darling, as much as anything else. A lot of men start skipping that way when they begin to get into their fifties.



MRS. ESPENSHADE

And did you notice the whistling, too?

MRS. WENTZ

Well, that usually goes with the skip. I think they're kind of surprised at themselves that they're still able to do it.  
*[The hall buzzer sounds.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning and moving across again towards the hallway*)

That's very likely Penny.

MRS. WENTZ

Not a word to *her*, either, Ollie, now, remember.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She wouldn't believe you, anyway,—about *him*. He can simply do no wrong, as far as *she's* concerned. (*The MAID appears from the back, and continues on towards the front.*) I imagine that's Miss Penny, Anna.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming a few steps towards MRS. WENTZ again*)

He completely spoiled her, you know, when she was growing up: I could do absolutely *nothing* with her. There was a perfect conspiracy between them *always*, to circumvent *me*.

PENNY (*outside*)

Hello, Anna.

ANNA

Hello, Miss Penny.



MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing quickly to the center table to pick up her bag*)

It's she.

PENNY

How do you always keep so nice and clean-looking, Anna?—I can never do it. Oh, what heavenly-looking roses!

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*going towards the bedroom*)

I'd better fix myself up a bit. Tell *her* the same thing you were going to tell *him* if she asks you: that you were over this way on an errand.

[MRS. WENTZ *nods her understanding* and MRS. ESPENSHADE *disappears into the bedroom*.]

PENNY

Is Mother in?

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am, she's there. And Mrs. Wentz is there, too.

PENNY

Well! Now, that *is* something! (*She appears in the doorway, carrying a large pocketbook, and with a cigarette in her fingers*) Mrs. Wentz!

MRS. WENTZ

Hello, Penny.

PENNY (*crossing above the center table*)

It doesn't seem *possible* that I've actually gotten here in time to see *you*.

MRS. WENTZ

I think we've been dodging each other.

[ANNA *passes the archway, going towards the back*.]

PENNY (*shaking hands with* MRS. WENTZ)

We *must* have been. Mother's been assuring me almost every other day it seems that I've just missed you. How *are* you?

MRS. WENTZ

I'm very well, Penny, how *are* you?

PENNY (*coming forward and around below the table*)

Well, I'm just about holding my own, really.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, that's something.

PENNY (*laughing a bit, as she moves up through the center of the room*)

Yes, I suppose it is, these days. Where's Mother?

MRS. WENTZ

She's just gone into her bedroom; she thinks she has something in her eye.

PENNY (*turning and drifting forward again, and across to the chair at the left of the table*)

And I suppose Popsy's already left for Brookside, hasn't he?

MRS. WENTZ

No, he's out there having some lunch.

PENNY (*sitting down*)

Oh, wonder of wonders!

[*She proceeds to get her handkerchief out.*]

MRS. WENTZ

He said he'd drop me at my house if I'd wait for him.

PENNY

I've been getting here for the past month just in time to miss *him*, too.

*[She touches the corners of her mouth.]*

MRS. WENTZ

How is your child, Penny?

PENNY

Well, I haven't seen very much of him lately, Mrs. Wentz, to tell you the truth. I mean, he's at school every day until noon: and then in the afternoon he's some place else.

*[She laughs.]*

MRS. WENTZ

Does he go to school already?

PENNY

Oh, my dear, he's been going since last September.

MRS. WENTZ

Not really?

PENNY

He started the *very* first day of the term.

MRS. WENTZ

He's very young, isn't he, to be going to school?

PENNY

He'll be three in August.

*[She returns the handkerchief to the bag and puts the bag on the floor at the left of the chair.]*

MRS. WENTZ

I *thought* he couldn't be much more than that.

PENNY

I suppose it *was* a bit young to start him. Mother was simply horrified. But, as I told her, I'd been looking at the child since he was born, and I *knew* he was a type that should begin his adjustment as early as possible.

MRS. WENTZ

Where does he *go* to school, Penny?

PENNY

To Doctor Bajarian, in the Ziegler Building: right there beyond the Medical Arts.

MRS. WENTZ

Oh, yes.

PENNY

He's that wonderful Russian child specialist from Russia—that I suppose you've been hearing about.

MRS. WENTZ

No, I haven't.

PENNY

Well, he's a perfectly *fascinating* person. I'd heard *two* of his lectures before I decided to send Punchy over there; and they were absolutely breath-taking. I mean, they were so *sane*.

MRS. WENTZ

How does Punchy *like* going to school? I suppose he hates it, doesn't he?

PENNY

No, I don't think so. At least, I've never heard him *say* that he did. And of course I never ask him; because Doctor Bajarian is rather positive on that score.

MRS. WENTZ

You mean, about asking him how he likes school?

PENNY

Well, about asking him questions generally. He says it's a form of talking *down* to children, that they resent, as a rule,—especially little boys. And we *are* expected to co-operate to a *certain* extent in the school's attitude. (*lowering her tone*) I really think that's the reason Punchy and Mother have never been able to hit it off very well: she just *will* not co-operate.

MRS. WENTZ

Doesn't Punchy like your mother?

PENNY (*half-glancing over her left shoulder in the direction of the bedroom door, and lowering her voice still further*)

Oh, my dear, he *loathes* her,—intensely. You've never seen anything like it. A perfect Oedipus complex in reverse; and once removed of course. *I've* simply given up trying to drag him over here: he just *will* not walk.

MRS. WENTZ

Doesn't he come over here at all?

PENNY

I don't think he's been here since Christmas. Just sits right down on the pavement if he even *suspects* that I'm heading in this direction. And of course it's entirely Mother's fault, for she *will* talk down to him. And he just can't bear it.

MRS. WENTZ

What does she say to him that he dislikes so?

PENNY

Well, she asks him if he's been out on his tricycle lately. And how the little dog is. And how he's getting along at school. And, naturally, the child just stands and looks at her as though she'd gone *completely* ga-ga.

MRS. WENTZ

And how *do* you find out how he's getting along at school, just from the reports?

PENNY

No, the school doesn't issue reports, as a matter of fact: Dr. "B" doesn't approve of them,—particularly with the children in the lower age groups. He says they're changing *so* continuously at that time that he thinks it's just a waste of time to attempt any conclusions *about* them: for they only have to be revised again in the next ten minutes.

*[She laughs a little and turns away. Her mother is coming forward from the bedroom door to put her bag on the table, and Penny greets her tolerantly.]*

Hello, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Hello.

*[She drifts across below the couch towards the mantel-piece mirror.]*

PENNY

Did you get the *beam* out of your eye, or the *mote*, or whatever it is they call it?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I hope so.

MRS. WENTZ

I was telling Penny you thought you had something in your eye.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*looking in the glass*)

I think I had something in both of them the way they felt.

PENNY

I thought that was *my* specialty. Vernon always says if he got as many things in his eyes as *I* do, he'd go out blindfolded.

MRS. WENTZ

How *is* your husband, Penny?

PENNY (*with a noticeable shift of tone, and tapping cigarette ashes on to the table tray*)

He's very well, thank you, Mrs. Wentz.

MRS. WENTZ

That's good.

PENNY

At least he *appeared* to be,—the last time I heard from him.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *listens*.

MRS. WENTZ

Is he away some place?

PENNY

No, he just isn't *talking* these days, Mrs. Wentz, if you know what I mean. (MRS. WENTZ *gives an understanding inclination of her head, and* MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns smoothly and moves up and across above the couch*



*towards the middle of the room.*) It's his way of putting me in my place if I insist upon having an opinion about anything.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Have you had another row with Vernon?

PENNY (*turning to her mother, with rather amused impatience*)

Certainly not, Mother; I don't have rows with Vernon.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, what did you have, that he isn't speaking to you again?

PENNY

We simply had a discussion, that's all.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving forward at the left of the couch and across below it to the small ornamental bench below the mantelpiece*)

That amounts to about the same thing, doesn't it?

PENNY

I'm afraid it does,—as far as he's concerned. Especially when I won't allow him to bully me into agreeing with his absurd romanticisms. (*There is a fractional pause; and* MRS. ESPENSHADE *sits down on the bench. And* PENNY *turns to* MRS. WENTZ *again.*) I have the most incredibly sentimental husband, Mrs. Wentz, that you've ever met in your life.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He's a very steady young man, Mabel:—I don't think you'd find him in the least sentimental.



PENNY (*vastly annoyed*)

Now, Mother, you *must* admit that Vernon is a bit naive when he starts talking about life and marriage.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'll admit nothing of the kind. I think he simply has a bit of *heart* left in him, that's all; and a few ideas about faithfulness and moral obligation,—(MRS. WENTZ *flips her handkerchief out of her bag in a kind of signaling gesture to MRS. ESPENSHADE, to warn her away from the subject of faithfulness in husbands. And MRS. ESPENSHADE heeds the warning and looks away. And MRS. WENTZ pretends to use the handkerchief briefly, and then returns it to the bag.*) and a few other things that probably do make a person seem a bit incredible these days.

PENNY (*turning to MRS. WENTZ again*)

Well, anyway,—if I don't happen to *agree* with his particular ideas on *faithfulness*,—and *moral obligation*, he immediately becomes terribly unappreciated for a day or two, and simply sulks till he gets over it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think you're very lucky that that's *all* he does.

PENNY

Perhaps I am, Mother. But I have an idea that part of being lucky might have something to do with being realistic about things, too. (*There is a sound of jaunty whistling from out at the right, and she looks inquiringly in that direction.*) Is that Popsy whistling out there?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*significantly*)

That's Popsy.

[MRS. WENTZ *laughs*; and PENNY *turns and looks at her.*

PENNY

He's being very gay, isn't he?

MRS. WENTZ

He has a new suit on today, and I think he rather fancies himself in it.

PENNY (*turning to press the fire out of her cigarette*)

Poor Papa.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*with irritation*)

I don't know why you always keep saying "Poor Papa," Penny. He's certainly not very poor. And I *must* say I've never seen anything very pitiable about him, either.

PENNY (*getting up*)

I think *all* men are more or less pitiable, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But why *should* they be, any more than women?

PENNY (*moving across below the table*)

Because they're just babies.

[*She pauses at the left end of the sofa to survey herself in the mantelpiece mirror.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, nonsense!

PENNY

Don't *you* think they are, Mrs. Wentz?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You and your babies!

MRS. WENTZ

I think they're rather *old-fashioned* babies, Penny, to tell you the truth.

PENNY

Well, *I* think they are, just the same.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It's a wonder you didn't say they're just *innocent* babies.

[MR. ESPENSHADE *appears in the hallway, coming from the back, and stands in the arch.*

PENNY

Well, I think some of them are *that*, too.

ESPENSHADE

You think some of them are what, Penny? What are you talking about?

PENNY (*extending her right arm towards him*)

Popsy!

[*She starts across to him, and MRS. ESPENSHADE turns away with a slight movement of annoyance.*

ESPENSHADE

I recognized your voice away out there in the dining room.

PENNY

I haven't seen you in an age!

[*She embraces him.*

ESPENSHADE

I haven't seen *you*, either: I thought you'd forgotten about us.

PENNY

Oh, you old peach pie! (*He laughs.*) You're getting so handsome I can't bear it!

ESPENSHADE (*detaching himself, and crossing below her and down towards the center of the room*)

Where have you been keeping yourself?

PENNY (*following him*)

Where have *you* been keeping yourself! I've been here every Saturday this past month.

ESPENSHADE

You don't get here early enough.

PENNY

Let me look at your new suit,—I was just coming out to see it.

ESPENSHADE (*turning around to his left to her*)

How did you know I *had* a new suit?

PENNY (*in the middle of the room*)

Why, it's in every paper in town.

ESPENSHADE (*coming back to her*)

Rather in the ultimate, wouldn't you say? I mean, in a manner of speaking?

[*He turns away again, towards the left.*

PENNY

It just isn't fair! (*He executes the little skip again, over below the table; and MRS. ESPENSHADE rises impulsively, gesturing frantically to MRS. WENTZ to observe the phenomenon. ESPENSHADE turns again, laughing, to his daughter, and his wife is obliged to turn away suddenly and pretend to be occupied with her hair in the mantel-piece mirror.*) for anybody to be so good-looking.

ESPENSHADE (*crossing below the table towards PENNY*)

Stepping right along with the best of them.

PENNY

Do *you* think it is, Mrs. Wentz?

MRS. WENTZ

Well, you see *me* here waiting for him, don't you?

ESPENSHADE (*deprecatingly*)

Ho! Ho! Mabel!

PENNY

It just isn't.

ESPENSHADE (*crooking his right elbow, to allow PENNY a closer examination of the suit*)

Don't you think that's a nice-looking suit, Penny?

PENNY (*feeling the goods*)

It's simply vast.

ESPENSHADE

And as light as a feather, too.

PENNY (*half over her right shoulder*)

I think you'd better watch him, Mother. (*He laughs.*)

I think he has plans.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving smoothly forward to the bench again*)

He's being watched.

[PENNY *arranges the flower in her father's coat.*

ESPENSHADE (*turning towards the right bedroom door at the back*)

You mustn't make fun of your poor old father, Penny.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *sits down.*

PENNY (*deprecatingly, and crossing below the table to resume her chair*)

Oh!

ESPENSHADE (*disappearing into the bedroom*)

That's what you're doing.

PENNY

The irony of that!

ESPENSHADE

I'll be with you in a minute, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

All right.

PENNY (*sitting down*)

Did you hear what he said, Mrs. Wentz?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, I'm afraid there was more in that than fell upon the ear.

PENNY

I should say so.

[*She picks up her bag from the floor and starts rummaging in it.*]

MRS. WENTZ

It is a pretty suit, though, isn't it?

PENNY

It's perfectly beautiful.

MRS. WENTZ

He must have been a sensation in that downtown this

morning; I'm sorry I didn't run into him—I think it might have helped me socially.

PENNY

Were you downtown today, Mrs. Wentz?

[ESPENSHADE *enters again briskly at this point.*

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, I went in to see an old doctor of mine. (ESPENSHADE *stops abruptly at the mention of the word doctor, and looks directly at her.*) He gives me some tablets for a funny shoulder business that I get once in a while.

[ESPENSHADE *is considerably relieved; and with a glance at his wife, who is watching him steadily, snaps his fingers suddenly, as though he had just remembered something, and retreats again into the bedroom.*

PENNY

What is it, neuritis?

MRS. WENTZ

No, I think I kind of threw something out, or in, or some place—a couple of years ago.

PENNY

Why don't you go to an osteopath?

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *rises, in something of consternation, and, watching MRS. WENTZ steadily, moves across to the coffee-table and gets a cigarette from the box: then puts the cigarette right back in the box again and drifts nervously back to the bench.*

MRS. WENTZ

Well, I did go to one once, but I think he kind of frightened me. And I never went back again.



PENNY (*amused*)

What did he do to you?

MRS. WENTZ

Well, he asked me to sit down on this funny kind of settee thing that he had there and tell him all about it. And almost before I got started he came around behind me and threw his arms around me.

[PENNY *laughs*.

PENNY

And he was very strong, I suppose?

MRS. WENTZ

And *very* unattractive.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *sits down again*.

PENNY

You'd probably told him enough to let him know what to do for you.

MRS. WENTZ

No, I just felt somehow that I'd given the wrong impression.

[PENNY *laughs again*.

PENNY

They very often put their arms around you that way, from the back, and lift you up.

[ESPENSHADE *enters again and goes directly to the drawer in the console at the upper right*.

MRS. WENTZ

I suppose so. But I thought it was a little advanced for a first visit.

[*She turns to the desk tray to dispose of her cigarette and PENNY laughs again*.



PENNY

Why don't you go to a woman osteopath?

[*There is a second of physical stillness, during which ESPENSHADE looks closely at a small box of tees that he has taken from the drawer, and MRS. ESPENSHADE looks closely at him.*]

MRS. WENTZ

I didn't know there *was* such a thing.

PENNY

Oh, yes, I think so. There *are* women osteopaths, aren't there? (ESPENSHADE *closes the drawer quietly.*) Popsy?

ESPENSHADE (*turning towards her, as though he hadn't heard the question*)

What?

PENNY

There are women osteopaths, aren't there?

ESPENSHADE (*drifting towards her a few steps*)

I don't know. I never heard of one. Why? Has somebody dislocated something?

PENNY

Mrs. Wentz says her shoulder is bothering her.

ESPENSHADE (*crossing above the table to MRS. WENTZ*)

The purest imagination, Mabel. (*leaning over and proffering his left arm.*) If you'll just lean heavily upon me, you'll be astounded at what it'll do for you.

MRS. WENTZ (*getting her purse*)

Are you ready to go?

ESPENSHADE

Whenever *you* are.

MRS. WENTZ (*getting up*)

I'm all ready.

PENNY

I think you're both *very* mean to run away this way.

MRS. WENTZ (*crossing above the center table*)

It's your father's fault, Penny.

PENNY

I know it is. And he does it every Saturday.

ESPENSHADE (*stopping, in the center of the room*)

Why don't you come over for dinner some night, Penny?

PENNY

I'm going to.

ESPENSHADE

O. K., come ahead.

PENNY

And I'm going to make you tell me everything you know.

ESPENSHADE (*continuing towards the arch*)

I'll tell you. So long, Ollie.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

So long.

ESPENSHADE

I'll call you if I won't be able to make it for dinner.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

All right.

[*They stop, above the couch*]

MRS. WENTZ

And I'll give you a call sometime soon, too, Ollie.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, do, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

And let you know everything I know.

[ESPENSHADE *looks at her.*

ESPENSHADE

I'll bet that'll be something.

MRS. WENTZ

You'd be surprised. (*He laughs; and they move out into the hallway, MRS. WENTZ waving to PENNY.*) Good-bye, Penny, dear.

[*They go towards the front.*

PENNY

Good-bye, Mrs. Wentz.

[*She proceeds to get out her make-up.*

MRS. WENTZ (*calling back*)

Good-bye, Ollie.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*getting up*)

Good-bye.

[*She moves up to the archway and stands watching them go.*

ESPENSHADE

What are you doing over in this part of town today, Mabel, have you been downtown?

MRS. WENTZ

No, I suddenly developed an unconquerable desire to see *you*.

[ESPENSHADE *laughs*.

ESPENSHADE

You don't think there'll be any talk if we're seen leaving the apartment this way together?

MRS. WENTZ

I don't seem to care, really.

[*He can be heard laughing again; and then the outer door closes and there is a pause.*

PENNY (*applying some powder*)

Mrs. Wentz looks very well, doesn't she?

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *moves slowly away from the archway and across at the back of the room.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*abstractedly*)

Yes, she looks *very* well.

PENNY

Is she going away this summer?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I suppose so; she usually does.

PENNY (*looking critically at her make-up*)

*I'd like to get away some place this summer.*

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *stops and looks at her; then continues on and forward towards the lower window.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Aren't you going up to Maine?

PENNY (*putting the make-up back into the bag*)

I'd rather not: I'm a little tired of Maine. I've been up there for three summers now, and I'd like to go some place else for a change.

[*There is something of a pause. And her mother moves rather thoughtfully to the lower window, keeping her eyes on her.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Vernon likes it up there very much, though, doesn't he?

PENNY (*putting her bag on the floor beside her again*)

Well, *he* can go up there if he likes. But that doesn't mean that *I've* got to go. As a matter of fact, that's my principal reason for not wanting to *go* up there. I think we ought to get away from each other for a while; he's getting terribly edgy.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Has he said anything about going?

PENNY

Not yet he hasn't; we haven't discussed it. But I *know* he's just taking it for granted that I'm going. And that's what I object to;—he's taking me too *much* for granted altogether. And I think it's time I did something about it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to her*)

What discussion was it you had that he's not speaking to you?

PENNY

The usual kind.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

When was it, recently?

PENNY

Yes: Thursday night I think, after dinner.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And he hasn't spoken to you since?

PENNY (*with a shade of annoyance*)

I haven't *seen* him since, Mother: so I don't know whether he's speaking to me or not.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You haven't seen him since Thursday night?

PENNY

No: not a sign of him.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And where *is* he, Penny?

PENNY

I haven't the faintest idea, darling, *where* he is. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *moves thoughtfully up and across above the table.*) I walked out of the room Thursday night after our discussion, and when I came back he'd gone. And he's *been* gone ever since.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to her*)

And hasn't anybody seen him around there?

PENNY

He hasn't been around there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

How do you know?

PENNY (*turning furiously*)

Because I know his tricks, Mother. He's simply done

what he's done twice before,—last Thanksgiving and again in February.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Left the house, you mean?

PENNY (*lowering her voice*)

Yes. I never told you, but he did. And the last time he was away nearly a week.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And where was he?

PENNY (*becoming impatient with the continued questioning*)

I don't know; I didn't ask him. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *is ir-  
resolute.*) Sitting sulking somewhere I suppose, in some corner.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, after all, I don't think it's a thing you should be too casual about, Penny.

PENNY

Well, I'm tired of his silly tempers. And I'm *certainly* not going to let him get the impression that I'm trying to conciliate him, either. *He's* the one that ought to be doing the conciliating, if there's any to be done.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But something may have happened to him, Penny, you can't tell.

PENNY

Nothing has happened to him at all.



MRS. ESPENSHADE

You don't know whether there has or not.

PENNY

He's very likely down at the Criterion Club, where he usually goes to get over his tantrums. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *crosses back again towards the upper window.*) Either there or over at his aunt's, telling *her* all about it. And she'll agree with him, of course, completely; because she's just as absurd as he is—with her husband's picture on every wall and table and chair over there. You can hardly find a place to sit down.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming forward at PENNY's left*)

Well, what is it that you and Vernon disagree so violently *about* in these discussions, Penny? I wish you'd tell me.

PENNY

Because *I* simply *refuse* to allow him to force me into agreeing with *his sentimental ideas* about things.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

About *what* things? (PENNY *makes a movement of annoyance.*) That's what I'd like to *know*. What was the discussion *about* Thursday night? What were you talking about?

PENNY

About something that he'd *read* somewhere,—or somebody had *told* him about. Some married man that was having a great romance with somebody. And he was perfectly furious because the man had been married over twenty years. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *has become very still and is listening.*) He said he thought that if people had



stayed together that long they should be sufficiently adjusted to spend the *rest* of their time together. And *I* didn't agree with him. (MRS. ESPENSHADE wanders thoughtfully up and across at the back of the room.) I said I didn't think it was a question of adjustment at all, —that I thought it was a matter of growth. And that there was no reason why people should stop *growing* just because they were married. And then he started the old "silver threads among the gold" business. (MRS. ESPENSHADE comes to a slow stop above the sofa.) That he saw no reason why two people couldn't grow old together. And I said I thought that was ridiculous: that no two people could *possibly* react in the same way to a given experience. And then of course he had to personalize as usual, and ask me if I thought *I* had outgrown *him* would I leave him. And I said of *course* I would: that there was nothing else I could *do*. And *that* was where he began to sulk.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You'd be perfectly agreeable of course to his leaving *you*, too, if he felt that he'd outgrown *you*?

PENNY

Of course I'd be perfectly agreeable to it: I'd expect him to. I certainly wouldn't want to feel that I was hanging on to a man that didn't want me any more.

[*There is a thoughtful pause.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*quietly*)

Vernon may not be the type that outgrows people.

PENNY

Well, that's *his* misfortune, darling: if he wants to be just a case of arrested development.

[*There is another slight pause.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rather carefully*)

Did he *know* this married man that was having the romance?

PENNY

*I don't know, whether he did or not. (MRS. ESPENSHADE starts to move slowly across above the center table again towards the left.) But that wouldn't make any difference: he can become quite as moralistic whether he knows the people or not. I think the thing that really annoys him is that I refuse to take marriage seriously—I mean, as a permanent relationship in my life. (MRS. ESPENSHADE pauses up at the left, and stands looking curiously at her daughter.) I think it's an interesting experience; and I think it's an experience that the majority of women should have. But, like any other experience, I think if it's persisted in it can become a habit. And I think there are too many really important things that a person can do in his life to allow that.*

*[The telephone bell rings, and MRS. ESPENSHADE steps to the desk to answer it.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes?—Oh, yes, Vernon. (*She looks quickly at PENNY, who rises instantly, and, with a gesture, moves up past the desk, saying voicelessly, "I'm not here." Then she turns and watches her mother keenly.*) I'm very well, thank you, Vernon, how are *you*?—That's good. We haven't been seeing very much of you lately. Well, I suppose that's the way with most of us these days.—No, she isn't, Vernon. Did you want to speak with her? (*PENNY makes a gesture towards her mother, which her mother answers with a similar one.*) Yes, that's true, she does, as a rule; but she hasn't been here today,—at least, so far.

—No, she hasn't, Vernon.—No, as a matter of fact, I haven't talked to her at all these past few days.—Very well, Vernon.—You mean, now, this afternoon?—Well, it's convenient enough for *me*, if it is for *you*. Where *are* you, down at your office?—Oh, well, then, come right over, Vernon.—Not a thing in the world,—I was just sitting here—reading a letter. (*The allusion suddenly reminds her of the mislaid letter, and she anxiously touches the bosom of her dress and glances around the desk and the chair near the lower window.*) Yes, it's perfectly all right, Vernon, come right ahead. (*She hangs up and turns to PENNY, who picks up her bag and starts across below the table towards the mantelpiece mirror.*) He's coming right over here, he wants to have a talk with me about something.

PENNY

About *me*, I suppose.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't know ; I imagine so.

PENNY

Where *is* he, did he say?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing up to her bedroom door*)

No, he just said he was in a pay station about fifteen minutes from here.

PENNY (*at the mantelpiece mirror*)

Well, *I'd* better go ; I don't want to be running into him downstairs.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*opening the bedroom door*)

I must put on a dress.

PENNY (*turning suddenly from the glass and moving up towards her mother*)

And listen, Mother,—(MRS. ESPENSHADE *stops and turns.*) please don't be trying to conciliate him when he gets here.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

We don't even know what he's going to talk about at all yet.

PENNY (*turning away*)

Well, I don't think it's very difficult to guess.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing to PENNY*)

But don't you realize that this kind of thing can become very serious, Penny?

PENNY

Of course I realize that it can become very serious.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He's left you twice already you say.

PENNY

And he's come back again both times.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But the long threatening can come at last, too.

PENNY (*turning away and forward a few steps*)

I know it can.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving after her*)

And you surely don't want that to happen. Vernon is your husband, after all. And you were certainly crazy enough about him when you married him four years ago.

I should think the very memory of that if nothing else'd mean something to you. I'll never forget your wedding day while ever I live. I don't think I ever saw a more radiantly happy bride.

PENNY

Well, I don't want to go on being a bride all my life, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But don't you think you should at least consider which is the more important in your life—the success of your marriage or simply the championship of these opinions of yours?

PENNY

I think my personal integrity is more important than either.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away impatiently, towards the center of the room*)

Oh, stop your silly talk, Penny, I can't listen to any more of it!

PENNY (*starting for the archway*)

Now, don't let *us* have an argument, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, but what has your personal integrity got to do with all this ridiculous nonsense that you're listening to at these lectures you go to!

PENNY (*moving out into the hallway*)

I'm going, Mother; you can call me after your conference.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing quickly up towards the console*)

Well, wait just a minute, Penny!—I'd like to ask you something before you go.

[*There is a slight pause; and then PENNY re-appears in the archway and stands.*]

PENNY

What is it, Mother?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*motioning her to come further in, and turning and moving a few steps further towards the center of the room herself*)

Come here! (PENNY *crosses to her; and she turns and lowers her voice.*) I want to ask you something and I want you to tell me the truth. Are you interested in some other man?

PENNY (*turning suddenly away, and forward a step or two*)

Oh, really, Mother!

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*following her*)

Because you talk very much like a woman that might be.

PENNY

Can't you conceive of a woman having any other motive in life for *anything*?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not women that are always talking about their personal integrity I can't.

PENNY

Well, I happen to be married at the moment.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Exactly. And I think you've been married long enough



to realize that the majority of women only *stay* married as long as they're willing to let their husbands think they agree with them. And you've got a little boy on your hands, too. Have you given any thought to what's to become of *him* if you allow your home to be broken up?

PENNY

Well, I'd hardly thought of abandoning him.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away, towards the center of the room*)

Children are always more or less abandoned when their parents are separated.

PENNY

Well, I think most children see too much of their parents, anyway.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

So do I,—I agree with you! And *hear* too much of *some* of them.

PENNY

Doctor Bajarian was only saying on Thursday that—

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*whirling upon her and interrupting her, almost viciously, and crossing to her*)

I don't give a damn *what* Doctor Bajarian was saying on Thursday, so don't bother telling me! For I think he must be as big a fool as those that go and listen to him. (PENNY *is momentarily shocked at her mother's outburst, and turns and starts for the hallway. And her mother follows her.*) And I don't think your husband and I'll have any argument about *that* when he gets here, either. So you'd better go now, unless you want to be running into him out there.



*[She gives PENNY something of a push along the hallway, towards the front, and turns and comes back into the room, considerably ruffled. Then suddenly PENNY reappears in the archway to deliver a parting shot.]*

PENNY

You'll be having another of your headaches tomorrow.

*[And she vanishes as quickly as she came. And her mother whirls around and flies to the archway to retort in kind.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*calling after her*)

Well, if I do, I'll know how I got it!

*[The outer door slams and she comes back into the room more ruffled than ever. She bristles for a moment, looking darkly over her right shoulder toward the hallway. Then she becomes aware of her bag on the table and steps over and picks it up. She stands thinking for a moment, looking toward the lower window. And, suddenly, she remembers the mislaid letter, and hurries across to look for it again. She peers searchingly under the big chair and pulls the cushion out to make sure that the letter has not fallen down between the upholstery on the sides. And there it is. She whips it up feverishly and examines it; then replaces the cushion and starts towards the bedroom door. Apparently something occurs to her suddenly, for she stops and thinks for a second; and then crosses definitely to the archway and pushes the button. She glances into the hallway after PENNY, and moves back towards the middle of the room, taking the letter from the envelope and looking at it again. It appears to depress her slightly, for her eyes wander away, and she stands looking off through the lower window, very troubled. The MAID appears in the doorway.]*

ANNA

Did you want something, Mrs. Espenshade?

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *is slightly startled, and turns to the*  
MAID, *lowering her voice.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, yes, Anna. I'm expecting Mr. Hassett here in a few minutes; and when you let him in, please don't say anything about Miss Penny having been here today.

ANNA

All right, Mrs. Espenshade, I won't.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She has a lot of errands to do, and she didn't want to wait.

ANNA

I see.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

So she says for us just not to mention that she was here at all.

ANNA (*withdrawing*)

All right, Mrs. Espenshade, I'll remember.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to the bedroom*)

And will you take that tumbler out, Anna, and those ash-trays.

ANNA (*crossing at the back towards the smoking-table near the big chair below the lower window*)

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*disappearing into the bedroom*)

I must put a dress on.

ANNA

Don't forget about your appointment at three o'clock, Mrs. Espenshade.

[*She proceeds to arrange the various articles on the smoking-table and to pick up the ash-tray. And MRS. ESPENSHADE reappears in the bedroom door, taking off her bracelets.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Don't forget about my *what* at three o'clock, Anna?

[ANNA *turns to her.*]

ANNA

Why, you told me to be sure and remind you about an appointment that you had today around three o'clock.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Did I say what it was, do you remember?

ANNA

I think you said it was a wedding, Mrs. Espenshade, over at Saint Stephen's Church.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*throwing up her hands frantically, and going down towards the right, below the sofa*)

Oh, my God, what am I thinking of!

ANNA

You said you wanted to leave here by two-thirty.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What time is it now, Anna?

ANNA

It's just about a quarter past, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*going up towards the back, desperately irresolute*)

Oh, did anybody ever *hear* of such stupidity! And I've just told Mr. Hassett to come right up here.

ANNA

Couldn't you call him back and tell him you have to go out somewhere?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming forward again*)

I don't know where he *is*, Anna! He said he was calling from a pay station somewhere. (*crossing towards the right, below the sofa.*) Oh, dear, oh, dear, what a fix that puts me in!

ANNA

Could you see him sometime later this evening, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*retracing her steps*)

I suppose I could, of course—

ANNA

And *I* could tell him when he comes?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But I should see him immediately. But I don't see *how* I'm going to do it and keep this other appointment.

[*She turns, irresolute, at the back.*]

ANNA

Would you want me to tell him where you've gone, and he could go over *there* and talk to you?

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *comes to a decision, and moves forward, slightly to the right of the table, rather weighing her words.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, I think you'll simply have to tell him when he gets here, Anna, that when I talked to him a few moments ago I'd completely forgotten about an appointment that I had this afternoon at three o'clock.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But that if he'll call me any time after six this evening, I'll be delighted to make another appointment.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And say that I'm frightfully sorry, naturally; but that this was a wedding of two *very* close friends of mine, and that I didn't see *how* I could possibly stay away without offending them.

ANNA (*turning again to the smoking-table*)

All right, Mrs. Espenshade, I'll tell him.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving towards the archway*)

But don't say that I'm here, Anna, if he should get here before I leave.

ANNA

No, I won't.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Just say that I've already left.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am, *I* understand.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And be sure not to say anything about Miss Penny having been here today.

ANNA

No, I won't.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He might think she was avoiding him.

[*She glances cautiously out into the hallway toward the front.*]

ANNA

Whose wedding is it that you're going to this afternoon, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming back towards her, and with a shade of amused embarrassment*)

Well, I don't know *who* they are, Anna, really: (*The MAID straightens up slowly and turns and looks at her curiously.*) but their pictures were in last Sunday's paper; and *she* is the most *beautiful* thing you've ever seen in your life. (*The curtain starts to descend.*) And the young man she's marrying is quite as good-looking. So that's the reason I've been rather anxious about getting over there this afternoon; for I *know* they're going to make the most *adorable*-looking couple. And I suppose I'd better get started unless I want to get there when it's all over.

[*She vanishes into the bedroom, and the MAID moves slowly across towards the center table, holding the ash-tray in her hand, but continuing to look curiously toward the bedroom door.*]

THE CURTAIN IS DOWN





## ACT TWO



## ACT TWO

### SCENE I

*The curtain rises on the same room about six-thirty the same evening. And after a slight pause MRS. ESPENSHADE enters from the hallway and crosses to the center table. She is appropriately dressed for attendance at a summer-afternoon wedding and looks very smart. But one would hardly say merry. For as she puts her bag down and gets her handkerchief out, and starts across towards the mantelpiece mirror, it is obvious that the more emotional aspects of the occasion had the greater appeal. She looks at herself rather ruefully and touches the handkerchief to her eyes; then turns, and, preparing to remove her hat, crosses up to the bedroom door and vanishes. And almost immediately ANNA appears in the hall door, coming from the back, and looks inquiringly. She notices the bag on the center table and comes far enough in to see that the bedroom door is ajar.*

ANNA

Are you in there, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I'm here, Anna.

ANNA

Oh, I didn't hear you come in. And Mrs. DeShon said she thought she heard the hall door close.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I just came in this minute.

ANNA

But it's so funny I didn't *hear* you—I was right there in the dining room. And I was listening for you, too; because Mrs. Wentz called a while ago and said to ask you to call her as soon as you got in.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

When did she call, Anna?

ANNA

Why, just about six o'clock. And she said to be sure and call her, that it was very important.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

All right.

[*The MAID starts to withdraw; then stops and turns again.*]

ANNA

And Miss Penny called, too; but I told her you'd gone out. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *comes out of the bedroom, shaking the folds out of a fresh handkerchief.*) She called about a half an hour after you'd left.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Did she ask you if Mr. Hassett had been here?

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am. But I told her that you'd left word that you couldn't see him till later this evening. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *nods slightly and moves forward to the center table.*) So she said to please call her as soon as you got back.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

All right, Anna, thank you very much.

ANNA (*withdrawing*)

Yes, Ma'am. (*turning back again.*) Oh,—and Mr. Espenshade won't be home for dinner. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *pauses and looks at her.*) He called about half-past five and said not to wait for him; that he didn't think they'd get through out there much before seven, and that he'd have his dinner at the Club.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving forward to sit at the left of the table*)

All right, Anna.

ANNA

Would you like me to get Mrs. Wentz for you now, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, thanks, I'll call her after a bit.

ANNA (*starting for the hallway*)

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*sitting down*)

I want to sit down for a moment, I'm tired.

[*The telephone bell rings.*]

ANNA (*crossing at the back to the desk*)

Maybe that's her now.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

If it's anybody else, say that I'm not home yet.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Unless it's Mr. Hassett, I'll talk to *him*, too.

ANNA

All right, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And if it *is* he, Anna, stay here for a minute till I see if he wants to come up here for dinner.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am. (*She takes off the receiver.*) Hello?—Oh, yes, just a minute, Mr. Hassett, she's here.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *gets up and crosses to the desk; and ANNA hands her the receiver and moves across to the upper side of the center table, where she pauses and abstractedly straightens the table articles, then loiters on across towards the doorway.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Hello?—Oh, yes, Vernon,—Yes, I just got in a few minutes ago. And I do hope you understood, it was very stup—Well, any time at all now, Vernon. Perfectly,—I haven't a thing to do.—No, he telephoned a while ago that he was staying out at the Club for dinner.—I understand. Have *you* had *your* dinner yet, Vernon?—Oh, I see—Of course.—All right, that'll be perfectly fine. (*She hangs up and turns from the desk, moving across below the center table to look at herself in the mantelpiece mirror.*) He won't be here for dinner, Anna, he's going to his aunt's.

ANNA (*starting out*)

Oh, all right, then.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But he'll be here in a few minutes, so listen for the buzzer.

ANNA

Yes, I will, Mrs. Espensshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You don't think I look as though I'd been crying, do you, Anna?

ANNA (*moving forward to the right end of the sofa*)

No, I don't think so.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*looking critically at herself*)

I always cry so at a wedding. And it makes my eyes look so dreadful.

[*She turns from the glass and crosses back again to the table.*]

ANNA (*moving a step or two closer to her*)

I always thought weddings were sad.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, they make a perfect wreck of *me*.

ANNA

Especially when you know the way the majority of them are going to turn out.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*looking at herself in the hand-bag mirror*)

Yes, I suppose that's true.

ANNA

I wonder sometimes why people bother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*looking away off*)

But there's always been something so terribly touching to me about two people standing up before all the world



and promising to be faithful to each other while ever they live.

ANNA

Yes, it *is* sad.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*visibly affected*)

I mean, it's so beautifully trusting. And I seemed to sense that this afternoon for some reason or other, more than I ever have in all the countless weddings I've been to. (*She uses the handkerchief and moves around the left of the chair to sit down again.*) I don't know when I've cried so.

ANNA

Maybe you shouldn't go to so many weddings, Mrs. Espenshade. I mean, when they upset you so.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*sitting down*)

But the flowers were so perfectly exquisite: I don't know who ever arranged them. And such wonderful music. The girl that sang "Oh Promise Me" had one of the most heavenly voices I've ever heard in my life. I must ask Miss Clyde who she was.

ANNA

Isn't it funny, that's a song I've never cared for.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns and looks at her.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

"Oh Promise Me?"

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am. Somehow or other I just don't like it.  
[*She laughs a little.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, I think it's a very lovely song, Anna.

ANNA

I know. But it always sounds to *me* as though they didn't trust each other. (*She laughs again, self-consciously.*) I guess that sounds terrible—but that's the way it always sounds.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*reflectively, and getting out her compact*)

I think perhaps some of them trust each other too much, Anna.

ANNA

Yes, I guess so.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Far too much.

ANNA

But of course you can understand that when people are young; they don't know any better.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think that's what affected me over there this afternoon; they looked so terribly young. And those words are so frightfully solemn. Especially that part about forsaking all others, and until death do us part. I just can't listen to it without weeping.

[*She touches her eyes again.*]

ANNA

I don't think people take that part of it very serious, though, these days, do you, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not seriously enough I'm afraid.

ANNA

From what you see in the papers most of them are only looking for a chance to forsake the one they marry to cling to all the others.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*with a change of tone*)

Anna, did Miss Penny ask you where I'd gone when you told her I'd gone out this afternoon?

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am. I told her you said you were going to a wedding of two friends of yours over at Saint Stephen's Church.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Did she ask you who they were?

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am, she did: but I told her that you were in such a hurry that you didn't say. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *nods and relaxes slightly.*) I said you forgot all about it till it was almost time to go.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

All right, Anna, thank you very much.

ANNA (*starting out*)

Yes, Ma'am. And don't forget to call Mrs. Wentz, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rising, and starting across to the desk*)

No, I'll call her right away.

[*The hall buzzer sounds.*]

ANNA (*changing her course, and going towards the front*)

I guess that's Mr. Hassett now.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, I hardly think it could be he yet for a few minutes.

[*She starts to dial.*]

MRS. WENTZ (*outside*).

I'm keeping you very busy today, Anna.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *immediately hangs up and turns from the desk, crossing down below the table towards the right, and looking in the direction of the hallway inquiringly.*]

ANNA

Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Wentz.

MRS. WENTZ

Has Mrs. Espenshade got back yet?

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am, she's in there; she just got back.

MRS. WENTZ

Oh, well, that's fine.

ANNA

I was just telling her you'd called.

MRS. WENTZ (*appearing in the archway*)

Thank you very much, Anna. Ollie, I'm terribly sorry to be such a pest. . . . (*She moves into the room, making a deft little gesture to MRS. ESPENSHADE, signifying that she has something extremely confidential to communicate as soon as the MAID is out of the way.*) but I think I left a letter here this afternoon.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*taking her tone*)

Yes, you did; I found it in the chair, there, after you left.

[*The MAID passes along the hallway, towards the back.*]

MRS. WENTZ (*crossing at the back of the room*)

It must have slid down at the side when I was sitting over there.

[*MRS. ESPENSHADE turns suddenly and comes to the right side of the table.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What is it, Mabel?

MRS. WENTZ (*sitting quickly at left of the table*)

Did you really find that letter?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I have it here in my bag. But I want to know about this other thing first. Did you hear from this woman?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, she called me.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And what did she say?

MRS. WENTZ

Well, he's *not* out at the Country Club.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing desperately above the table to the left*)

I knew it.

MRS. WENTZ

That's what I wanted to see you about.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

The deceitful wretch!

MRS. WENTZ

I called you about six o'clock, but Anna said you hadn't got back yet.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I know, she told me.

MRS. WENTZ

So I thought as long as I was out, I might just as well get in a taxi and come right over here.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming forward at MRS. WENTZ's left*)

How do you know he didn't go out to the Country Club this afternoon, Mabel, what did this woman say?

MRS. WENTZ

He *did* go out there; but he didn't *stay* out there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You mean he met *her* out there?

MRS. WENTZ

No, he picked *her* up afterwards: that's what I wanted to explain to you; it'll show you what a fox he is. But I didn't want to tell you from my house, because I think that girl over there listens.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing directly above the table again towards the hallway*)

Of course, they *all* listen.

MRS. WENTZ

I mean, the one on the switchboard over there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

This one out here is probably listening *now*.

MRS. WENTZ

They say they can't listen in on a switchboard connection without your knowing it, but I don't believe them.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*peering back along the hallway*)

Neither do I.

MRS. WENTZ

For I hear all kinds of buzzings and clickings while I'm talking over there and I *know* she's listening.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*hurrying back to the left of the table*)

Why do you think he went out to the Country Club at all this afternoon, Mabel, when he didn't intend to stay there?

MRS. WENTZ

That's part of the trick, Ollie.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He said he was playing golf out there.

MRS. WENTZ

They *all* say that, darling—

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away a little to the right*)

The brazen liar!

MRS. WENTZ

Either that or that they're going fishing. Minnie says they always say the same thing.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Who's Minnie, this Nichols woman?



MRS. WENTZ

Yes; her name is Minerva.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming back to the table*)

What time did she call you, Mabel?

MRS. WENTZ

About a quarter of five. And she said she'd just gotten in; and that she was an absolute wreck; because she'd been following the car from the minute she saw *me* get out of it in front of my house.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Did you see *her* at all when you got out in front of your house?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes; I glanced around just as I was going in my door, and I saw her start after him.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Where was she?

MRS. WENTZ

About a block and a half away, on the other side of the street. She was parked under a tree. And she said she followed them for nearly two hours.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Followed whom, Mabel? Who was with him?

MRS. WENTZ

This woman, darling, that he's been going around with.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, she wasn't with him *then*, was she? I mean, when he left *you*?

MRS. WENTZ

No, certainly not; he picked her up afterwards at her offices. That's what I'm telling you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing above the table again, to the left*)

Well, that's what I didn't understand.

MRS. WENTZ

She has a suite of offices in the Meredith Memorial Building, on the third floor; and her name is Hilton—Doctor Claudia Hilton.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

How do you know?

MRS. WENTZ

I've just come from there, Ollie: that's where I called you from. I mean, from a pay station out there. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns away suddenly and pulls the desk chair closer to MRS. WENTZ and sits down, in order to give a more concentrated attention to the report. And MRS. WENTZ gives a quick glance toward the doorway and resumes.*) Minnie said that after he dropped *me* in front of my house, he went across to the river and straight out to the Country Club. And *she* parked in a little side road where she could watch the entrance. Because she said she knew it wouldn't be long before he'd be right out again. And sure enough, in about fifteen minutes, out he came.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

How did she know he'd be right out again?

MRS. WENTZ

I don't know, dear, how she knew it, but she did; she's had a lot of experience in this kind of work. And she says

men always do the same thing when they're cheating. I mean, they really do go to the place that they tell their wives they're going to go—in case she's having them followed, I suppose. And they stay around there long enough to let a few people see them—in case she's checking up on them. But, anyway, when he came out of the Club, she says he drove straight back to the river and on out to the Boulevard. But she says he didn't cross the river there—he kept going straight on out, to what looked to her like a new settlement of some kind. She says she never knew there was such a place over that way. And she says right in the center of it, there was this enormous building—that she thought at first was a hospital or something. But it was an office building, called the Meredith Memorial Building. And that's where the girl friend's offices are.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Did she see *her*?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, she says she saw her come out of the building and cross the pavement, after *he* tooted the horn. And she says the minute he saw her, he literally *leaped* out of the car and ran around to the other side to help her in.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Of course.

MRS. WENTZ

But she says when he jumped out of the car, he kind of turned on his ankle.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm glad he did.

MRS. WENTZ

And she says he must have given it quite a twist, for they stood talking about it on the pavement for quite a while. She says she knew that's what they were talking about, because they kept looking down at his ankle, and he kept twisting it around in different directions.

*[She imitates the movement with her right foot.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Was she able to tell what she looked like at all?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, she says she was rather plump; but neat-looking. And she had on a Navy blue one-piece dress and a white hat. And some kind of a light coat over her arm, as though they might be going out for the evening somewhere.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*getting up*)

He telephoned a while ago that he wouldn't be home for dinner tonight.

*[She takes a step or two towards the lower window.]*

MRS. WENTZ

Well, that's probably where they were going. But this building where her offices are is in a kind of big open garden: and Minnie says the only place she could park without looking suspicious was in front of an apartment house. And she said that was too far away to be able to see anything definite even through her opera-glasses.

*[She turns and glances toward the doorway.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She has no idea where they went from there?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, she said she followed them till nearly four o'clock. And that they went from there across the Viaduct and out through Ravenswood. She says she has no idea where they were heading for, because there's nothing out that way, you know, till you get to Cloverton. But she says she kept right after them, till she noticed that her gas was beginning to get low. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *makes a gesture of vast annoyance.*) And it was so deserted out there, she says she thought she'd better stop and get some so that she wouldn't get stuck on the way back. And, of course, that was where she made her mistake. Because she says by the time she started after them again, they'd disappeared as completely as if they'd gone through the earth. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *crosses above the table towards the right.*) She says she drove around there for a while, but they must have turned off on to a side road some place.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And parked somewhere, you may be sure.

MRS. WENTZ (*relaxing*)

Well, of course, I don't know anything about that.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning suddenly to her*)

Well, why else would they turn off on to a side road, Mabel!

MRS. WENTZ

I don't know, dear; but that's what they must have done.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing down at the right*)

And that's undoubtedly where they are right now, too.

MRS. WENTZ

But it must have been a pretty lonely road when Minnie

Nichols couldn't find it. (*She gets out her handkerchief and touches it to her brow.*)

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming towards her again*)

How did she find out this woman's name, Mabel, did she tell you?

MRS. WENTZ

She didn't find it out, darling; *I* did; that's what I'm coming to. As soon as she could get back to a pay station she called me. And when she mentioned this Meredith Memorial Building I called a taxi and started right out there. It took me nearly three quarters of an hour going like lightning. But, anyway, when we got out there, there it was—just as she said. And when I looked at the Directory inside, there was the name—Claudia Hilton, M.D. And she's the only woman doctor in the building; and it says M.D. *and* Osteopath. So it couldn't be anyone else. And she has four offices, three-fifteen, sixteen, seventeen and eighteen—an entire suite I suppose. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *moves towards the right to glance out into the hallway again.*) So I called you from a drug store out there, but Anna said you hadn't got back yet.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I didn't get back till nearly six-thirty.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, that's the reason I came right in: I thought by the time I'd get here, you *would* be back.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming quickly back to the right of the table*)

Well, what do you think I ought to do, Mabel? Do you think I ought to *say* anything to him?



MRS. WENTZ

What can you *say* to him, Ollie!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I mean, don't you think it might *frighten* him a little, if he thought I suspected something?

MRS. WENTZ

No, dear, I don't.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not even if he thought people were talking about him?

MRS. WENTZ

No.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away, with a kind of childish irresolution, and going forward towards the right again*)

Then, I don't know what to do about it.

MRS. WENTZ

I think the best thing to do is wait till next Saturday afternoon and have Minnie Nichols follow him again.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*impatiently, and coming back*)

I can't *wait* till next Saturday afternoon, Mabel, I've got to *know* something!

MRS. WENTZ

What else can you *do*, darling!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Can't she follow him some *night*, when he goes out?

MRS. WENTZ

You can't find out anything in the dark, Ollie!



MRS. ESPENSHADE

She can find out where he *goes*, at least.

MRS. WENTZ

And what good would *that* be, if she can't see what he does when he gets there! (MRS. ESPENSHADE *crosses above the table towards the left.*) Besides, you have to have a witness; they won't take just one person's word for anything.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to her*)

Well, *you* could go along as a witness, couldn't you?

MRS. WENTZ

Of course I could go along; but what good would I be! I can hardly see anything in the daytime let alone at night.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to the upper window*)

I *know* it'll be raining next Saturday afternoon—I just *know* it!

MRS. WENTZ (*getting up*)

Well, then we'll know what he does when it's raining.

[*She moves across below the table to the mantelpiece mirror.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

That's what it's *been* doing every Saturday for the last month until today.

MRS. WENTZ

Only I'll tell her the next time she follows him to be sure she has gas enough before she starts—so that she can really *see* what he's up to. And then she'll have to keep *on* following him till he makes a blunder. Because you'll

need all the information you can get, Ollie, if you ever want to *do* anything about it. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns and looks directly across at her. But* MRS. WENTZ *is busy with her hat at the looking-glass.*) And it'll have to be facts, too; or he'll lie out of it and go right on fooling you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving a bit towards her*)

What do you mean, Mabel, if I ever want to *do* anything about it?

[*She stops in the middle of the room; and* MRS. WENTZ *turns rather casually around to her right and looks at her.*

MRS. WENTZ

Well—(*She moves across a few paces to a point in front of the couch and stops.*) you'd hardly be satisfied to let it go along this way, would you? I mean, if it's what we think it is?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*holding* MRS. WENTZ'S *eye, and moving slowly towards the right*)

You mean, divorce him?

[MRS. WENTZ *lifts her shoulders slightly and moves across to a point above the table.*

MRS. WENTZ

That depends,—on what you find out. And how much it means to you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving forward slowly to the back of the couch*)

Well, it doesn't mean enough to me to be just another of his women, I can promise you that.

MRS. WENTZ

Then, you'll have to force him to a decision of some kind.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't have to tolerate that, fortunately. (*The hall buzzer sounds, and she turns and moves up towards the doorway.*) That's very likely Vernon.

MRS. WENTZ (*putting her handkerchief into her purse*)

Well, then, I think I'll run along.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Can't you stay here for dinner? *He's* not staying, for I've already asked him.

MRS. WENTZ

No, I can't. I'm having Phoebe Short and her two grandmothers in for dinner tonight, and I've got to be there on the dot.

[*She crosses towards the hallway.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't know what it is he wants to talk to me about, but he's called me twice this afternoon and I'm a little worried.

[*The MAID passes along the hallway, going towards the front.*]

MRS. WENTZ

I'll go through the dining room—just slip out that way.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

That's probably Mr. Hassett, Anna.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And Mrs. Wentz'll go out through the dining room.

ANNA

All right, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. WENTZ (*crossing below MRS. ESPENSHADE*)

I'll call you if I hear anything.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, do, dear.

MRS. WENTZ (*with a glance over her right shoulder after the MAID, and lowering her voice*)

And I'll call Minnie Nichols the minute I get home and tell her to make no more appointments for Saturday afternoons till further notice.

[*She vanishes at the back.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Good-bye, darling, and thanks for everything. (*The telephone bell rings, and she hurries across to answer it.*) Hello? Oh, yes, Penny . . . I couldn't see him, darling, I had another appointment. And I didn't know where to get hold of him to head him off. And he's at the door now, so I'll have to call you back. Well, can't you talk to me about it tomorrow? Well, then, you'll have to come over after dinner. Yes . . . about eight-thirty or nine—I'll be through by that time. (*She hangs up; and VERNON suddenly appears in the doorway. And she turns quickly, extending her arm towards him.*) Oh, Vernon!

VERNON (*crossing to her*)

Good evening, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm terribly sorry to have had to put you off this way.

VERNON

Oh, that was all right.  
[*They shake hands.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I was simply frantic after I'd hung up this afternoon and then remembered this other appointment.

VERNON

I was only hanging around down at the Club, anyway.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

How are you, Vernon, it's nice to see you.

VERNON

I'm very well, Mrs. Espenshade, how are you?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm well, thanks. But do sit down. (*She indicates the chair at the left of the table, and moves to the desk chair.*) Are you really going out to your aunt's for dinner tonight?

VERNON (*reaching into his pocket for a cigarette*)

Yes, I am, really.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*sitting down*)

Because I have a perfectly beautiful dinner out here, and not a soul in the world to eat it.

VERNON (*sitting down*)

Aren't *you* having any dinner?  
[*He lights the cigarette.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I have just about as much appetite tonight, Vernon, as a canary.

VERNON

That's too bad.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

That's the reason I'm sorry you can't help me out.

VERNON (*turning to dispose of the match-stem on the table tray*)

You mean you know my capacity.

[*He laughs a little.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I'm sure you'd be very useful.

VERNON

Well, thank you very much. But I'm afraid my aunt'd never forgive me.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, I shan't urge you, of course. But tell me what it is you wanted to talk to me about, Vernon; I know you haven't very much time. Is it about business?

VERNON (*finding it a little difficult to proceed*)

No—it's a little more personal than that. (*He turns and looks directly at her.*) It's about Penny and me. (*And she inclines her head ever so slightly.*) We don't seem to be hitting it off very well lately—not at all well.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You mean you've been quarreling?

VERNON

No, I wouldn't exactly say we've been quarreling. As a matter of fact, I'd be a little more optimistic about things

if we *were*. It's just that we don't seem to *agree* about anything—I mean, about anything at all. And from the way she talks, I don't think it's going to be any better in the future.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *relaxes uneasily*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, of course, so much of the talk of girls like Penny can't possibly be taken seriously, Vernon.

VERNON

I don't think that applies in *her* case, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

*I think myself she's simply repeating what she hears at these lectures she goes to.*

VERNON

But she talked that way before she *went* to those lectures. At least, she did to *me*. I used to think she was just trying to sound advanced. But now I think it's a sort of conviction that she has. I mean, something that she believes in—or, at least, something that she's trying to make herself *think* she believes in—and intends to mould her future by. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *makes a slight gesture of annoyance and gets up, moving thoughtfully across above the table towards the right.*) And I've been wondering lately whether it wouldn't be wiser for *me* to just accept it that way—and do something of the same thing myself.

[*She stops and looks at him. And there is a slight pause; then she moves a step or two forward at the right of the table.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't quite understand what you mean, Vernon.

[*He turns and looks at her.*



VERNON

Well—I mean, do something about my *own* future. (*She holds his eye for a second.*) That's the reason I asked you on the telephone this afternoon whether she'd said anything.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

About what?

VERNON

About my not *being* there anymore. (*She appears still not to understand.*) I left there Thursday night and I've been living down at the Criterion Club ever since.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But you don't intend to *stay* there, do you? (*He lifts his shoulders significantly. And she suddenly appears to appreciate the seriousness of the situation and starts down and across below the sofa towards the right.*) Oh, no, you mustn't do that, Vernon!

VERNON

I feel that I'm wasting my time, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

That's simply out of the question!

VERNON

That's what *she* intends to do.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing up around the right end of the sofa*)

She can't *possibly* intend to do any such thing!

VERNON

That's what she *says* all the time.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming back towards him*)

But you mustn't believe her, Vernon! Women don't seriously want to see their marriages broken up, I assure you.

VERNON

I think *she* does.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing above the table to the left*)

I don't believe it. And nothing that she could say would make me believe it.

VERNON

She says marriage is an arrestment of the spirit.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*pursuing her own thought, and crossing back towards the center of the room again*)

She's only posturing; and trying to appear very emancipated.

[*Then she suddenly becomes aware of what he has just said, and turns and looks at him.*]

VERNON

And she absolutely refuses to—

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What did you say she says marriage is, Vernon?

[*He looks at her.*]

VERNON

She says it's an arrestment of the spirit.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*going forward at the right*)

Oh, really! I mean, after all.

VERNON

And she absolutely refuses to have any more children: she tells me that quite frankly.

*[She turns, below the sofa, and faces him.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And what does she call that?—an arrestment of something else, I suppose?

VERNON

No—she says she considers having more than one child is a surrender to the new generation.

MRS. ESPENSHADE *(with a gesture of surrender, and moving up through the center of the room and across above the table to the upper window)*

Well, there you are.

VERNON

And she says since there's no guarantee that that'll be any improvement on the present one, she prefers to completely realize herself.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And what does she intend to realize, I'd like to know.

VERNON

I don't know, Mrs. Espenshade, I didn't ask her.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, you may be perfectly sure that *she* doesn't know, either.

VERNON

But she'd have had an answer for me if I *had* asked her, I can promise you that.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, I know all about her answers; I've had arguments enough with her myself to have heard a lot of them.

VERNON

And if I ask her what's to become of the boy if she walks out, she says I'm being obvious.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving down to the lower window*)

The silly fool!

VERNON

And if *she* doesn't say something, the kid *does*: she's got *him* almost as nutty as herself.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning from the window*)

I wonder you bother listening to them at all, Vernon.

VERNON

I've *got* to listen to them, Mrs. Espenshade—unless I get away from there altogether. And that's what I *did* Thursday night. And I've done it twice before; although I don't suppose anybody knew about it. I just couldn't *take* any more of it. (*He rises angrily and crosses to the right. And there is something of a pause,—during which* MRS. ESPENSHADE *stands watching him steadily. Then he turns to her.*) If I only say it's a nice day, they *look* at each other. And the kid says I'm not being very original—or else *she* says I must have been reading Longfellow. (*He leans down to press the fire out of his cigarette on the coffee-table tray.*) So I just have to keep quiet, or get myself into an argument of some kind.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*sitting on the desk chair*)

I think I understand something of what you've been putting up with, Vernon.

VERNON (*getting himself another cigarette from his pocket*)

Well, I had an idea you would.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think I occupied about the same position between Penny and her father for a long time, as you do now between Penny and the boy.

VERNON (*coming back to the right of the table*)

I think Mr. Espenshade's responsible for a lot of Penny's attitude toward things, I really do.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But I think *we're* largely responsible ourselves, Vernon, for their attitude toward *us*.

VERNON

Yes, I suppose we are.

[*He lights the cigarette.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

We've allowed ourselves to be taken for granted. And most people will take advantage of that—and nearly all young children will.

VERNON (*disposing of the match-stem on the table tray*)

I'm just a *joke* to that kid of mine over there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, that's because you've allowed yourself to be. And I think you were very wise to walk out and leave as you did. But you must not go back, Vernon, till there's an understanding of some kind.

VERNON (*looking straight out, and very quietly*)

I don't intend to go back, Mrs. Espenshade.

[*There is a fractional pause.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You mean, not at all?

*[He turns and looks at her; and moves his head a couple of times from side to side.]*

VERNON

They've got to come to *me* this time. (*They hold each other's eye for a further second.*) I like my home; and I like a family. And I'm perfectly willing to do whatever is necessary to keep it going. But I *don't* like it well enough to let anybody push me around.

*[He crosses towards the right again.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think you're perfectly right, Vernon.

VERNON (*turning to her*)

And I certainly don't intend to devote any more time or energy to building up something that's going to be thrown overboard whenever it suits *her* convenience.

*[He continues further to the right.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Certainly not.

VERNON (*coming back to her*)

And that's what she intends to do, Mrs. Espenshade, I know by her talk.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm not disputing you.

VERNON

As soon as ever that kid is old enough to be sent away to school somewhere, she's going to walk right out of this, and—

*[He makes a little gesture leaving the sentence in the air.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Realize herself.

VERNON

Yes.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I know.

VERNON (*turning towards the back of the room and over towards the hallway*)

Whatever that is.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, now, listen, Vernon. She'll very likely come to *me* with this—I mean, if you continue to stay away.

VERNON (*coming back to the table*)

Yes, I imagine she will.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She'll want to know what to do about it. I don't think she privately considers me a very intelligent person. And I don't think her father does, either, as a matter of fact. But they usually come to me when there's something to be settled. And I'm very suddenly finding myself a little tired of being appealed to as a very *last* resort: especially when I've been completely disregarded till they've brought the trouble *on* themselves. So that I'd like to know your *side* of this, Vernon—I mean, exactly,—as far as last Thursday night is concerned: I want to know just what brought about the discussion. I mean, how it started.



VERNON (*moving forward and across below the table to the chair at the left of it*)

Well, of course, a discussion can start in so many ways, Mrs. Espenshade—

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I understand that.

VERNON

Especially where Penny's concerned,—that ordinarily I wouldn't even remember.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I simply wanted your *version* of it.

VERNON (*sitting down*)

Well, I remember starting to tell her about a case here in town that I've been hearing a lot about for the past year, of a man that's been married over—twenty years, running around with another woman. He's been married over twenty-five years, as a matter of fact. And I said I thought that was stupid. I said I thought if he were going to run around that way, he ought to come to some decision about it; and act accordingly. And, of course, *she* didn't agree with me; and started the usual line about the—static of conventional thinking, and people outgrowing each other, and all that stuff. And then, as usual, she starts applying it to *me*: and to *our* marriage. Well, of course, there's no use arguing with her, for she'll only keep going while ever you answer her.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I know.

VERNON

So I just stopped talking. And after a while she went out

into the back garden to take some kind of breathing exercises that she's been doing lately. But after she'd gone, I began to think maybe it was time that I came to a few conclusions. But I couldn't think anything out *there*: so I got a few things together and went down to the Club. And I've *been* there ever since.

*[He turns to the table tray to press the fire out of the cigarette. And there is a pause.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*without moving, and very quietly*)

Was the man that you were telling her about Mr. Espenshade, Vernon?

*[There is a physical stillness; then he continues to press the fire out of the cigarette, as though he hadn't heard her. After a second or two he recovers himself sufficiently to give a slow final press to the cigarette-butt and to attempt to glance casually at the tips of the fingers of his right hand and to rub them together. Finally he turns slowly and looks at her.]*

VERNON

Which man, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*still without moving*)

The man that you say has been married over twenty-five years, and is going around with another woman. (*He holds her eye for a moment.*) Because I think that's who you mean, isn't it?

VERNON

Well, as long as you ask me, Mrs. Espenshade, it is.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And that's really what you were trying to tell Penny Thursday night, wasn't it, when she kept interrupting you all the time?

VERNON

I didn't know what else to do about it, to tell you the truth.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I understand.

VERNON

I'd been hearing little left-handed references to it from time to time. But I didn't feel it was *my* place to say anything to Mr. Espenshade. And I knew he wouldn't want *you* to know anything about it. So I thought maybe if I said something to Penny. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *smiles ruefully and gets up.*) She's always been so close to her father.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving to the lower window*)

She'd only have given you an answer, Vernon.

VERNON (*getting up*)

Yes, I suppose she would.

[*He moves aimlessly across towards the right.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She's made a perfect idol of her father all her life. Because he's always allowed her to do exactly as she pleased. (*turning and moving back to the left of the table.*) And thought it was very amusing to hear her insist upon having the last word in every argument with *me*; especially where *he* was concerned. So I'm rather glad you *didn't* have an opportunity of telling her this the other night; for *I* want to tell her myself. (*She moves up towards the back.*) She'll very likely accuse *me* of being responsible for it—but I've got my answer all ready for her if she does. (*turning and speaking directly to him.*)

And *she* gave it to me: (*coming down towards the lower window again.*) just as she's given me several others I can use if she comes here about this business between you and her.

VERNON

Well, I hope I haven't *started* anything around here.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You haven't at all. I'd heard it all before.

VERNON

Well, I'd imagined you had.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*to herself*)

I seem to have been hearing this for a long time.

VERNON

It's very unfortunate.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning easily from the window*)

And it's very curious . . . the fact that I don't find it nearly so disturbing as I would have imagined I would. (*moving slowly to the left of the table again.*) I have an idea that my husband and daughter have been teaching me quite a few things these past few years, that I'd hardly have realized if something of this kind hadn't happened. And it's surprising, now that it *has* happened, how well their teachings have prepared me to meet it.

VERNON (*drifting back to the center of the room*)

I'm afraid it isn't going to be easy to make Penny believe a thing like this about her father.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving across above the table towards him*)

No, I think I'll probably need your assistance to a certain extent in that, Vernon. I've only heard the whisper,

naturally; and I doubt that she'll be willing to accept that. But if I can give her a few names and dates, there won't be very much else she can do. (*She continues on across above him, towards the hallway. And he moves thoughtfully to the right of the table.*) And it might be a very good thing for her: it'll at least let her see that everything in the world isn't exactly the way she's decided it is. And the woman *scorned* isn't a role that women particularly relish. (*She moves forward at the extreme right; and he turns his head smoothly and looks at her over his left shoulder.*) And that's precisely the position that your leaving her has placed her in. And I'll tell her so, too, when she comes here to *me* with it. (*turning and coming across towards him below the couch.*) And I'll also suggest that before allowing her home to be broken up, she might consider just how well she'd like living with a stepmother. (*continuing on and across above the table to the desk.*) And that could be quite easily what she'd face,—in the light of this little revelation about her father. For she certainly would not come home to *me*: I've listened to quite enough of her talk as it is. But, as you say, Vernon, she won't believe this about her father unless I have the facts: so I'd like you to tell me whatever you know. (*She picks up a pad and pencil from the desk.*) And I want to put them down on this pad so that I can memorize them: (*coming forward at the right of the desk chair.*) for I don't want her to think that anybody told me. I want her to think I found them out myself.

[*She settles herself to take notes.*]

VERNON

Well, the only thing *I* know, Mrs. Espenshade, is that this woman is a doctor.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*making a note of it*)

Yes, I know that, Doctor Hilton.

VERNON

That's right. And she lives out there near my aunt somewhere—around Kettering Square.

[*She looks over at him.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Does your aunt know her, do you know?

VERNON

I don't know whether she does or not. She may know her by sight; I understand she's lived out there quite a while.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

*You've* never seen her, have you, Vernon?

VERNON (*coming forward and across in front of the table to resume his chair*)

Yes, I *met* her once, as a matter of fact.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, did you!

VERNON (*sitting down*)

Yes—I guess it's about a year ago now. One of the girls down in the office used to do secretarial work for her once in a while. And I was coming back from lunch with her one day and we ran into her. And after we left her I happened to say that I thought she was rather a nice little woman. And *she* said, "I'm glad you like her." And I said, "Why?" And she kind of laughed. And I said, "I don't know what you mean." "Well," she said, "you never can tell; she might be your mother-in-law some day." (*He looks away in embarrassment, and* MRS. ESPENSHADE



*moves uneasily in her chair.*) But I just thought it was an expression:—till I began to hear things later on; and then I remembered what she said.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, what type of woman *is* she, Vernon? I mean, this doctor woman? Is she young, or old, or what?

VERNON

No, I'd say she was just a plump little person.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*writing*)

Plump.

VERNON

Yes: and kind of little.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But neat-looking, I suppose?

VERNON

Yes, she was rather neat-looking.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *looks at him*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And how old did she appear to be, about fifty?

[*She makes another note.*

VERNON

No, I wouldn't say she was fifty.

[*She looks up again.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You think she's more than that?



VERNON

No, I wouldn't say she was much past forty. At least she didn't appear so to *me*.

*[She holds his eye for a further second; and then reluctantly proceeds to make an erasure.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Of course it's very difficult to tell nowadays. But I was just wondering what her general type was.

VERNON

Well, she's a rather plain little woman, as I remember.

*[She looks at him.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not pretty?

VERNON

No, I wouldn't say she was pretty. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *nods and makes a note of that.*) But there's something rather appealing about her. I mean, you remember her.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Was that the only time you met her? That day on the street?

VERNON

Yes, that was all. And, as I say, it was at least a year ago; and yet I can see her as clearly as if it were yesterday.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

How was she dressed, Vernon, do you recall?

VERNON

Yes, she had a blue dress on, very plain.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Navy blue, was it?

VERNON

I guess so; it was dark. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *continues to write.*) And she was carrying some white flowers.  
[*She looks up at him keenly.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And did she have a white hat on, too, do you remember?

VERNON

Yes, I believe it *was* white. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *nods significantly and returns to her notes.*) Kind of round. I believe they call them halo hats.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*writing*)

He can't be spending very much money on her; she's still wearing that same outfit I understand.

VERNON

Well, she looked very nice in it, I must say.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She must have given a rather Madonna-like impression, didn't she, with all those white flowers and halos around her?

VERNON (*looking away off, and rather reflectively*)

No, she gave me kind of a sad impression, for some reason or other. (*He turns and looks at her.*) It wasn't like a Madonna.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, of course, Madonnas are never very hilarious, Vernon.

VERNON (*still somewhat abstracted*)

No, I know. But it was something different. I got the idea that she'd seen a lot of trouble in her life. I mean, trouble of her own. As a matter of fact, this girl that used to work for her *said* that she'd had a pretty hard time of it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, who *is* she, did she say? I mean, has she any people?

VERNON

No, I don't think she has anybody at all. I think she said she was brought up in an orphanage. And when she came out of there she went to work as a waitress in a Medical College somewhere. And she used to sit in at the various lectures, and finally decided that she wanted to be a doctor. And the school arranged for her to keep on working there, and pay for her tuition that way.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Did this girl tell you how she happened to meet Mr. Espenshade?

VERNON

Yes, she said he was playing golf one Saturday afternoon out at the Meredith Country Club. And the man that he was playing with sprained his back some way, making a shot. And Mr. Espenshade drove him over to *her* offices in Meredith Village for a treatment. She's an osteopath, too, you know.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, so I understand.

VERNON

This girl was there when they came in. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *is looking at him steadily.*) And she said it was just,—

one of those things. (*He gives an embarrassed little laugh and looks away.*) That can happen, you know.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rousing herself slightly*)

But don't you think she was probably *flattered* more than anything else? I mean, being a plain little person, as you say, that probably nobody ever looked at; and then suddenly to have some rather attractive man pay attention to her?

VERNON

Well, this girl says that Mr. Espenshade's got it just as bad as *she* has. As a matter of fact, she says that this woman told her that when he first told her he was married—*she* wanted to call the whole thing off; but that *he* took such a sinking spell that she had to give *him* a treatment. (*MRS. ESPENSHADE holds his eye for a second; and then lets her gaze wander slowly away.*) And she says she was talking to her again on the street about a month ago, and she said *she* couldn't call it off herself now, either; that she'd rather die. (*He continues to look at her for a pause; and then strikes his knee lightly with his right hand and gets up.*) So it's evidently quite a romance. (*He attempts a rather pallid little laugh as he crosses below the table and up a bit at the right of it.*) One of those "in which we feel the pressure of a hand" things. (*He turns, laughing, and looks at her.*) Do you remember that one?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*completely transported*)

"One touch of fire—"

VERNON

That's it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

"And all the rest is mystery."

VERNON

I didn't think anybody remembered that but me. (*He laughs a little more; but she is still hearing only the laughter of lovers in some far-off glade. So there is a slight pause; and then the French clock on the mantel-piece strikes a single silvery chime, and he glances at it; and, with a change to something of a more matter-of-fact tone, turns and starts towards the hallway.*) Well, I guess I'll be running along, Mrs. Espensshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming suddenly out of her abstraction, and getting up*)

Oh, yes, I mustn't keep you, Vernon. (*She puts the pad and pencil on the table as she crosses above it.*) Were you wearing a hat?

VERNON

Yes, I left it out here at the door. (*turning to her, and lowering his voice slightly.*) And, of course, all this is strictly between ourselves, Mrs. Espensshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, of course. And if Penny should happen to get in touch with *you* for any reason, Vernon, don't let *her* know that *you've* told *me* anything, either.

VERNON

No, I wouldn't.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But if you should hear anything more, Vernon, I hope you'll let me know about it, too.

VERNON

Yes, I will, Mrs. Espensshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

For the sake of the family, I mean.

VERNON

Yes.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

The more we know about it, the better we'll be able to manage it.

VERNON (*backing out into the hallway towards the front*)

All right, Mrs. Espenshade. And thanks for letting me come up.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not at all, Vernon. And please remember me to Mrs. Niles.

VERNON (*calling back*)

Yes, I will. Good-bye.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*raising her right arm*)

Good-bye, Vernon. (*She waits for a second or two, and then the outer door is heard to close: and she turns and glances cautiously along the hallway toward the back, then hurries across to the telephone and dials a number. As she sits waiting, she glances nervously toward the hallway.*) Hello, Clara, this is Mrs. Espenshade again.—Oh, fine! Would you tell her I'd like to speak to her for a moment, please.—Thanks, very much. (*She waits again, rather impatiently. Then suddenly she notices her pad and pencil on the center table, and quickly puts the receiver down and rushes over to get them. She is just seated again when she is answered.*) Oh, hello, Mabel!—Yes, so Clara just said.—Well, listen, darling. (*She glances once more toward the doorway.*) Are you listen-



ing, Mabel?—Well, my dear, Vernon has just left here, and it's a wonder I'm able to talk to you at all, for he's left me absolutely speechless. (*The MAID enters from the hallway and comes down to the upper right-hand corner of the center table.*) Well, darling, he simply *knows* everything.—No, he wanted to talk to me about Penny, just as I told you. But I knew by a couple of things he said while he was here that there was something *else* he wanted to talk to me about, too, so I just asked him right out. (*The MAID, not wishing to interrupt, but realizing that MRS. ESPENSHADE is not aware of her presence in the room, moves forward quietly at right of the table.*) Through one of the girls down in his office: she used to do secretarial work for her occasionally. He's even *met* her, darling.—Yes!—This girl introduced him to her one day, coming from lunch. (*She half turns to glance in the direction of the hallway again, and the MAID is standing directly in front of her, below the center table. The MAID smiles and nods in an attempt to communicate the fact that dinner is served. But MRS. ESPENSHADE simply regards her unseeingly and goes right on as though she might be addressing the MAID herself.*) And I'm absolutely convinced now, Mabel, that it was his aunt that sent me that letter that I showed you.

ANNA (*almost apologetically*)

The dinner is served, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Because he says this woman lives right out there near her somewhere. (*The MAID turns away and moves a little up at the right of the table.*) And I knew by his face when I asked him if his aunt knew her that he was *not* telling the truth.



ANNA

The dinner is served, Mrs. Espenshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*going right on, and quite oblivious of the announcement*)

Well, anyway, they're simply *madly* in love with each other. (*The MAID, realizing that she has still made no impression whatever, turns away rather helplessly to her left and wanders up and over towards the doorway, where she loiters aimlessly.*) I've never heard anything so romantic in my life; she was even brought up in an orphanage. And she says she'll die a *thousand deaths* before she'll ever give him up. (*The MAID half turns, rather arrested by the extravagance of the expression, and MRS. ESPENSHADE goes feverishly on with her narrative. And the curtain starts to descend.*) And when she even suggested such a thing, he had such a *sinking* spell that he *very nearly died himself*. (*The MAID decides to withdraw.*) And only that *she* was a doctor, and was right there to *work* over him, he *would* have died.

THE CURTAIN COVERS HER

## ACT TWO

### SCENE II

*Two hours later; and MRS. ESPENSHADE is having coffee in front of the mantelpiece at the right. She is sitting on the little couch above the coffee-table, and considering the notes that she made during her interview with VERNON. The lights are on; and there is a light coming from her bedroom. She turns towards the bedroom.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Anna!

ANNA (*from the bedroom*)

Yes, Ma'am? (*After a second or two the MAID appears.*)

Yes, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Anna, will you hand me that green lead-pencil there on the desk.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not the one with the pink eraser on it—that's the hard one. It's right there somewhere, I was using it just before dinner. (*The hall buzzer sounds.*) That's very likely Miss Penny, Anna. (*taking the pencil.*) Thanks.

ANNA (*starting for the doorway*)

Yes, Ma'am.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *makes an additional note and then deftly tears two of the pages from the pad and gets up, crossing directly and putting the pad on the desk. Then she folds the two sheets and puts them in the bosom of her dress, turns, and, with a glance toward the doorway, recrosses to her place.*

PENNY (*out at the right*)

Hello, Anna.

ANNA

Hello, Miss Penny.

PENNY

I hope I'm not interrupting your dinner.

[*The outer door is heard to close.*

ANNA

Oh, no, Ma'am, we're all finished.

PENNY

That's good.

ANNA

Your mother's just having coffee there in the sitting room.

[*There is a slight pause, which MRS. ESPENSHADE carefully utilizes to pour herself another demi-tasse; and then PENNY appears in the doorway, and stands.*

PENNY

Hello. (*The maid passes along the hallway.*)

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Hello.

PENNY (*crossing to the center table and putting her bag down*)

I thought you'd be all through dinner by this time.

[*She continues on over, above the table, to glance at herself in the glass over the desk.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*resolutely casual, and lifting the demitasse to her lips*)

I am through; I was just having some coffee here. Would you like some?

PENNY

No, thanks; I had some at home. It's rather late for *you* to be drinking coffee, isn't it?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

A little, I suppose. But I felt the need of something this evening.

[*PENNY turns from the glass and comes back, to a point below the table.*]

PENNY

Whose *wedding* was it that you went to this afternoon? Anna said you went to a wedding at Saint Stephen's.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*studiously occupied with the coffee arrangements*)

I don't think *you* know them; they're connected with the Church over there.

[*PENNY withdraws her eyes a bit distrustfully, as she crosses up back of the couch towards the doorway.*]

PENNY

Did you know there's a light in your bedroom?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I think Anna was just in there turning the bed down.

(PENNY glances keenly along the hallway, toward the back.) Did you walk over, or did you come over in a taxi-cab?

PENNY

I came over in a taxi. (*The MAID closes the bedroom door from the inside; and PENNY glances at it, and then starts back to a point at the right of the center table.*) I suppose I did sound a little insistent on the telephone a while ago, about coming over here tonight.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I was wondering what it was that couldn't wait until tomorrow.

PENNY (*turning towards the back, and crossing above the table*)

Well, I suppose it could! (*Her mother glances keenly after her.*) And I suppose I'm being ridiculous paying any attention to it at all. (*coming forward at the left.*) But it's just one of those disgusting rumors that infuriated me so that I doubt I'll be able to even explain it to you connectedly.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE looks across at her.]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What is it?

[PENNY moves a step or two closer to her, glancing toward the hallway.]

PENNY (*lowering her voice*)

It's something that I heard this afternoon, right after I left here.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What about?

PENNY (*taking a further step; and dropping her voice even lower*)

It's about Papa. Somebody telephoned me at home: that's the reason I called you right away.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away casually*)

You mean, your *poor* Papa?

PENNY (*with extreme annoyance, and crossing up back of the couch again towards the hallway.*) Oh, really, Mother! I don't think you'll be nearly so complacent when you hear what it is!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, why don't you tell me, and then you'll *know* how I'll be.

[*She takes a cigarette.*]

PENNY

Well, there's plenty to be told, I can assure you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, that's what I'm waiting to hear.

[PENNY *turns from the doorway and starts back towards the center table, looking resentfully at her mother's back. And* MRS. ESPENSHADE *quietly prepares to light the cigarette.*]

PENNY

I suppose *Vernon* has been telling you his tale of woe here this evening, hasn't he?

[*She gets her handkerchief out of her bag.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not especially.

PENNY (*continuing on across below the table to the lower window*)

Well, I'm sure you found yourselves in perfect agreement, anyway, if he was talking about *me*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He wasn't talking about *you* very much, as a matter of fact.

PENNY (*turning from the window, and coming back a step or two*)

Well, whatever he was talking about, Mother, I hope you remembered what I said when I was leaving here this afternoon.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

About attempting to conciliate him, you mean?

PENNY

Yes. (*She moves up at the left towards the back, as her mother breaks into a wry little laugh.*) He likes to think of himself as being very much aggrieved.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm afraid you'd have to have been here to appreciate how very ironic that sounds, Penny.

PENNY

I know his talk: (*She turns and goes back down again towards the lower window.*) this isn't the *first* time he's left the house, you know.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rising slowly*)

But it *is* the first time he's left *you*. (*PENNY gives a derisive little laugh, and stands looking out the window.*)



And that's precisely what he's done this time, whether you like it or not.

*[She turns around to her left, and moves up to her bedroom door.]*

PENNY

Well, I guess I'll survive it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I've no doubt you will. But that's what he wanted to talk to me about—just *how* you were going to survive it.

*[She quietly opens the bedroom door and glances in.]*

PENNY (*turning from the window and coming back to the chair at the left of the center table*)

I'm sorry I couldn't have heard him; it must have been very interesting.

*[She sits down.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It was. (*She closes the bedroom door and moves forward a little.*) And I should think it would interest *you*, too, Penny. For I got a very distinct impression from the way he talked that he did *not* intend to allow *you* to draw any pension for breaking up his home.

*[She turns away, to the right.]*

PENNY

I think *he's* the one that's breaking up his home, isn't he?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He's only doing what *you* intend to do whenever it suits your purposes.

PENNY

Well, I haven't done it *yet*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*leaning smoothly over the back of the couch and picking up her purse*)

But you *intend* to do it, for you've told him so many times.

PENNY

Then, why did he marry me, when he knew the way I *felt* about those things?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*getting out her handkerchief*)

Because he probably felt you'd have gotten rid of some of your ridiculous ideas by the time you'd have been married nearly four years.

PENNY

Nothing at all, of course, about his getting rid of some of his?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*putting her bag down again*)

I'm only telling you what he says.

PENNY

The impertinence of him! I suppose he thinks he's outgrown me, doesn't he?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He says he thinks he's wasting his time *staying* with you.

PENNY

Well, listen, Mother—the next time he comes here for one of his conferences, I wish you'd tell him for *me* that I don't think he'll have very much to say about whether I'll have a pension or not,—after he has walked away from his wife and family.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*quietly, and moving a bit closer to her*)

No, I don't think it'll be necessary for *anyone* to say very much about that, Penny.

PENNY

I don't think so, either.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think all he'd have to do would be just repeat a few of your observations on marriage in any court, and they'd probably give *him* a pension. (*She turns away a little to the right again.*) And appoint him your guardian, in the bargain.

PENNY

Well, I'd expect that from *you*, Mother. That's the reason I didn't stay here this afternoon when he telephoned that he was coming up. I didn't feel quite equal to arguing with both of you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*drifting back towards the center of the room*)

Yes, Vernon and I have quite a few things in common.

PENNY

Well, I think you have your sentimentality in common, at least.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

The only difference between us is that Vernon isn't going to allow himself to be held cheap for as many years as I have. And that's really what you came over here to tell me about tonight, isn't it?

[PENNY *turns and looks at her.*

PENNY

What?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

About your father's lady friend? (PENNY *simply sits staring at her.*) The doctor woman that lives out near Vernon's aunt?

PENNY

Did *he* tell you?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving forward, and towards the right*)

Don't be naive, Penny.

PENNY (*rising and crossing below the table*)

Well, he *knows* about it; for his aunt told me so. It was she that telephoned me this afternoon.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*glancing at herself fleetingly in the mantelpiece glass*)

I don't have to wait for some *man* to tell me what the entire city has been talking about for years.

PENNY

Well, do you *believe* it?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't *have* to believe it,—I *know* it.

PENNY

Well, who *told* you?

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns around to her right and faces her.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

*He* told me, as a matter of fact!

PENNY

You mean Papa?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving across below her to the left*)

Yes! Your Poor Papa!—with his ridiculous skipping (*She gives a little skip, in imitation of her husband's recent performance.*) and leaping every time he crosses the floor. (*going up at the left of the table.*) And dancing in front of every looking-glass in the house, trying to make himself believe that his hair isn't going. (*turning and extending her right arm in a warning gesture.*) Whenever you see a man starting that kind of thing, you may be sure there's a lady in the woodpile *somewhere*. And if *you* hadn't been so absurdly sentimental about him all your life, you'd have realized it long ago. (*turning to the upper corner of the desk.*) And he's always whistling, too; that's another sign. Nobody's so happy that he's got to be whistling all the time: it isn't natural. [*She presses the fire out of her cigarette on the desk tray.*]

PENNY (*crossing suddenly to the right of the table*)

Well, hasn't anybody ever actually *told* you about him, Mother?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to her*)

Oh, don't be tiresome, Penny! I've heard about him from so many sources that I've had to make notes here so that I'd remember the details.

[*She indicates the desk, with a wide and wearied gesture.*]

PENNY

And haven't you ever *said* anything to him?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What for?

PENNY

Well, at least to let him know that you *know*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And give him a chance to lie out of it I suppose? No, I haven't. (*She moves across to the desk chair.*) She's a woman doctor, you know. And an osteopath. It'd be a very easy matter for him to insist that he was simply taking a course of treatments from her.

PENNY (*crossing below the table towards her*)

Well, it seems to me you could have done *something*, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Of course I could have done something. I could have done a great many things. But, as you say, I'm sentimental. Although *I* prefer to call it morally responsible. And I had a child on my hands. And I knew something of what *happens* to children that are deprived of a normal upbringing. How they come to privately despise and resent the parents that are responsible for it. So, like many another woman, I simply closed my eyes; and that's how he's been able to do what he's done.

PENNY

Well, you don't have to *continue* to close your eyes, do you?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No.

PENNY

Why haven't you done something since I've been married? [*MRS. ESPENSHADE is momentarily disconcerted.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Because he lay very low for a long time after your marriage. (*She sits down.*) I think he suspected that I'd heard something. So I wasn't able to do very much. But he's been *emerging* again this past year or so—so I've been able to get just about what I need.

PENNY

You mean, to talk to him?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Among other things, yes.

PENNY

What did you do, Mother, get a detective or something?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm my own detective. (*PENNY turns suddenly and goes up towards the back, irresolutely.*) It's been a little slow; because it has to be facts—that can't be explained away to suit *his* convenience.

PENNY (*turning from the window suddenly and coming forward again*)

Well, when *are* you going to talk to him, Mother? Because I think it's *terribly* important that you do. And I think the sooner you do it the better.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'll talk to him.

PENNY (*turning suddenly to the chair at the left of the center table and sitting down*)

And what are you going to say? I mean, are you going to show him your notes?

[*MRS. ESPENSHADE turns and looks at her, almost involuntarily touching the notes in the bosom of her dress.*]



MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think that's what was worrying Vernon when he was here this evening.

PENNY

What?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What I was going to say to your father when I talk to him.

PENNY

About this, you mean?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes.

PENNY

I thought you said he didn't tell you about Papa.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I told *him* about Papa. Only to discover that he knew it long before *I* did. And I told him because I thought he might be a little curious as to just how *you* might fare with a stepmother in the picture. (PENNY *sits looking blankly at her.*) That's probably what he was trying to suggest to *you* Thursday night, when he was telling you about the married man that was going about with another woman. And you kept interrupting him with your views on feminine emancipation. So I think he was rather glad of the opportunity to discuss it with *me*. He knows you have no particular equipment or profession of any kind. And he *certainly* understands how much *my* sympathy with most of your ideas could be counted upon. So I think he was a little troubled. Because *he's* sentimental, too, you know—even about *you*.

PENNY

Well, Mother, you don't mean that you would think of divorcing Papa, do you?

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns and looks at her.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Why not?

[PENNY *sits looking at her for another second or two: and then her eyes wander away and she rises slowly, looks suddenly at her mother again, and moves across below the table towards the right.*

PENNY

Because I don't think you should. I think that would be perfectly dreadful!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Do you think *you* have a monopoly on self-development?

PENNY (*stopping below the coffee-table*)

I don't think it's at all necessary.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

There are other women that may want to *realize* themselves as well as you.

PENNY (*going up through the center of the room*)

You're only saying that because you've heard *me* say it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

All right! If it's good enough for you—

PENNY (*directly to her mother*)

And it wouldn't surprise me if a lot of this weren't just a little plot between you and Vernon to get *me* to go back to him. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *makes a sound of amused*

*deprecation and starts to get up; and PENNY turns away towards the right.*) I think that's just what it is.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Your problem at the moment, Penny, if you only realized it, is to get your husband to come back to you.

*[She turns to the lower window.]*

PENNY (*coming back to the center table*)

I don't think that's nearly so important as that *you* should have a talk with father.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I have nothing to talk to him *about*.

PENNY

You have *this* to talk to him about, haven't you?

*[MRS. ESPENSHADE turns from the window smoothly and looks directly at her.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I've outgrown your father, Penny.

PENNY (*turning to the back again, and furiously*)

Oh, nonsense, Mother!

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving to the side of the chair at the left of the center table*)

Or perhaps we've outgrown each other.

PENNY (*coming forward to the back of the couch*)

You know perfectly well you don't believe that any more than *I* do.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I probably *wouldn't* have believed it if I hadn't listened to so many of *your* dissertations.

PENNY

I don't think you were ever very much impressed with those.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I wasn't. But since I made this discovery about your father, I've also discovered that I must have been a very good listener. For I find myself quite as confused now as if I'd been to one of those *lectures* you're always going to—to Doctor Bavarian, or Bajarian, or whatever it is you call him.

*[She turns towards the back of the room and over to the upper window.]*

PENNY (*coming across to the right of the table*)

I don't care *what* you say to *me*, Mother; you can make as much fun of me as you like: but I think it would be perfectly *monstrous* if you were to leave Papa.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning from the window*)

Because he *needs* me, I suppose.

PENNY

Exactly! (MRS. ESPENSHADE *makes a sound of amusement and continues on across towards the hallway.*) And nobody knows it any better than *you* do.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He needs a doctor, you mean.

PENNY (*following her*)

No, I don't mean anything of the kind.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And a *woman* doctor, preferably.

PENNY

But you know how much of this may be just gossip.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming to a stop at the back of the couch*).

I know.

PENNY

After all, she *is* a doctor! And it could very easily have begun by his going to her for a treatment, and probably found her interesting, and taken her out a few times.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Without realizing what he was doing, you mean.

PENNY

Well, at least, without realizing the interpretation that was being put upon it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Just a great big baby.

PENNY

Well, Mother, you *know* the way these things are magnified. (*turning away and crossing over and down below the table towards the left.*) All a man in Papa's position would have to do would be to be seen out with a woman a few times, and they'd talk about it forever. (*She comes to a stop and turns and speaks to her mother over her left shoulder.*) As a matter of fact, he may not have seen the woman for years.

[*Then she looks away.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*quietly*)

He's with her *now*. (*PENNY turns her head sharply and looks back at her; and her mother moves slowly towards*

*her, extending her right arm in a slightly exaggerated gesture.)* This very night—*parked* in his car, on a lonely road somewhere out beyond Cloverton. And that's where he's *been* parked, *every* Saturday night, and every Saturday afternoon, too, unless it was raining: (*turning away to the right.*) and then he was very likely parked somewhere else.

[*She stops below the coffee-table and leans down to get herself a cigarette.*

PENNY

I thought he played golf in the afternoons on Saturdays.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

That's what *I* used to think—till I discovered that that was simply another name for driving out to Meredith Village and picking *her* up at her offices. And if you wait around here a while you'll very likely see him hobble in and tell us how he turned on his ankle out at Brookside this afternoon. When the fact of the matter *is* that he turned on his ankle this afternoon out at Meredith Village, leaping out of his car the minute *she* appeared, and rushing around to help her into it. So you see how well-informed I keep on his movements.

[*She lights the cigarette.*

PENNY (*crossing towards her*)

Well, that's the reason I wonder you haven't *done* something, Mother. Or at least *said* something to him.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*disposing of the match-stem*)

It'll be done.

PENNY

But it ought to be done *immediately!* You don't know what's going on.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away, to the small bench below the mantelpiece*)

Apparently I know better than you.

PENNY

But you don't realize what people are *saying*, Mother. I haven't *told* you some of the things that Vernon's aunt told me this afternoon.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*sitting down*)

I've probably heard them before.

PENNY

You *couldn't* have heard them,—or you'd have *done* something.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, what *are* they? Why don't you tell me?

[PENNY *glances toward the hallway and sits down on the couch.*]

PENNY (*lowering her voice*)

They say this woman and Papa are going to be married. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *holds her eyes.*) That he's asked her to *marry* him. I know that's absurd; because he couldn't very well *marry* her while he's married to *you*. But that's what they're saying.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

*Who's* saying it?

PENNY

This nurse, that works in her office. She's a sister of the hair-dresser that Vernon's aunt goes to. And she says the doctor's going away the middle of July for two months—to some lake in Pennsylvania somewhere, where



she goes *every* summer—a place near Eaglesmere. And that when she comes back she's going to be married to a Mr. Espensshade. And Vernon's aunt says she *knows* she means Papa.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Is that what she called to tell you this afternoon?

PENNY

No, I don't think she even intended to *mention* that when she called: she simply wanted . . . (*There is a sound out at the right; and Mrs. Espensshade, with a gesture enjoining silence, gets up smoothly, watching the archway, and moves across to the coffee-table to get rid of her cigarette.*) Is that he?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think so.

PENNY

Would you like *me* to talk to him about this, Mother? (MRS. ESPENSHADE *straightens up and looks at her.*) Because I wouldn't at all mind if you'd rather.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But I *would* mind, very much; so please don't attempt it. [*She moves up at the right of the couch towards the hallway.*]

PENNY (*getting up*)

I just thought you might not care to discuss it with him. [*She crosses to the center table to get her bag*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning at the archway*)

Well, I'm quite equal to discussing it with him. (*coming forward to the back of the couch.*) And I'll resent

any intrusion of yours in this, Penny, quite as thoroughly as you've always resented any intrusion of mine in *your* affairs. So please remember it. (*She leans over the back of the couch and picks up her bag.*) And you'd better tell him that I called you for dinner when he telephoned that he wouldn't be home: he may wonder what you're doing here again tonight. (*She moves around the right end of the couch and down to resume her place on the bench.*)

PENNY (*coming back to her place on the couch*)

I'll be going in a few minutes, anyway; you won't want me here when you're talking to him.

[*There is a fractional pause; and* MRS. ESPENSHADE *glances at herself in the pocketbook mirror. Then* ESPENSHADE'S *voice can be heard approaching the entrance of the room.*

ESPENSHADE

Anna, you're just in time to help a poor crippled old man.  
[MRS. ESPENSHADE *looks significantly at* PENNY, *and listens.*

ANNA

Oh, did you hurt your foot, Mr. Espenshade?

ESPENSHADE

No, just gave my ankle a little turn out on the golf course this afternoon.

ANNA

Oh, that's too bad!

[*He appears in the doorway, with a topcoat thrown across his right arm.*

ESPENSHADE

Now, don't tell me you've been here since I left this afternoon, Penny! (*starting across towards the center table, and walking with a slight limp.*) Because that'd be altogether too much of a good thing.

[*The MAID enters, and loiters up near the doorway, waiting for an opportunity to ask if she may remove the coffee things.*

PENNY

Don't you see that I have all different things on?

ESPENSHADE

I haven't had a chance to look at you yet. Were you here to dinner?

PENNY

Yes, Mother called me, when *you* telephoned that you wouldn't be here.

[*The MAID glances at MRS. ESPENSHADE; and ESPENSHADE takes up his position beside the center table.*

ESPENSHADE

And where's your husband, did he leave you?

PENNY

He's over at his aunt's, I believe.

ESPENSHADE

Why didn't you bring him over here?

PENNY

She wanted to talk to him about something I think.

ESPENSHADE (*going up to his bedroom door*)

And are you just finishing your coffee now?

PENNY

We've been dawdling here, thinking *you'd* come in.  
[*She turns to look at her mother, only to find her half-raising herself from the bench to observe her husband's limp. So she turns to observe it, too. And the MAID's attention is also attracted.*]

ESPENSHADE

Where's your other cup?

PENNY

Mother didn't want any.

ESPENSHADE (*from the bedroom*)

I was sorry I couldn't make it tonight for dinner, Ollie. But I knew by the looks of things when I got out there this afternoon that I wouldn't be able to get away much before seven: so I thought I'd better call you and tell you not to wait.

ANNA (*moving forward at the right*)

Would you like some *more* coffee, Miss Penny?  
[PENNY *looks at her.*]

PENNY

No, thanks, Anna. You can take this away if you will.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And will you get some of that waxed paper, Anna, and wrap up a few of those roses out there for Miss Penny when she's going.

ANNA (*going up to the doorway with the tray*)

Yes, I will, Mrs. Espenshade.

PENNY

Thanks, Mother. I'll be going in a few minutes, Anna.

ANNA

All right, Miss Penny, I'll bring them right in.

*[She disappears at the back.]*

PENNY

Thank you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm afraid they'll begin to go by tomorrow; they're too full.

*[ESPENSHADE comes out of the bedroom, and forward at the right of the center table, reaching into his pocket for a cigarette.]*

PENNY

They are the most beautiful roses I've seen this summer.

ESPENSHADE

Which roses?

PENNY

The ones out here in the hallway.

ESPENSHADE

Yes, they are nice-looking roses.

*[He lights his cigarette.]*

PENNY (*regarding him steadily*)

But not nearly so nice as if *you'd* brought them, I suppose?

ESPENSHADE (*coming to the coffee-table to get rid of the match-stem*)

No, but there are some wonderful-looking roses around

town this year. (*sitting down on the couch.*) You should see the ones out at the Club.

PENNY (*still regarding him stonily*)

Which Club?

[*He looks at her.*]

ESPENSHADE

Brookside. (*She holds his eye.*) They're all over the place out there.

PENNY

Is that where you were playing today?

ESPENSHADE (*leaning back*)

Sure: (*She continues to hold his eye mercilessly; and MRS. ESPENSHADE watches.*) that's where I *always* play.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You play out at Meredith Village, too, sometimes, don't you?

ESPENSHADE

Once in a while. Jim Weatherly belongs out there, and I go out there with *him* occasionally. But I prefer Brookside.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Did I hear you say something happened to your ankle out there today?

ESPENSHADE (*holding out his right foot*)

Oh, that was nothing. I just happened to give it a little twist, going to the—fourteenth hole. I didn't notice it much till I got out of the car a minute ago.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

How did you happen to do it?

ESPENSHADE

Well, that was a very curious thing. (*turning and speaking directly to PENNY.*) It'll show you how things can happen. (*PENNY inclines her head knowingly.*) I pulled my drive going to the fourteenth—right into the rough—at least, that's what I *thought* I did. But the rough there is very narrow, and very deceptive. It slopes up into a kind of series of little knolls. And right behind them is one of the worst sand-traps on the course. But *I* didn't think I'd gotten anywhere *near* that far. But there she was—sitting right in the middle of it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Who?

ESPENSHADE

The ball, Ollie.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh!

PENNY (*without moving*)

He's talking about the golf ball, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I understand.

ESPENSHADE

The golf ball was in the trap.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I see. (*looking away.*) I don't know anything about golf.

PENNY

Go on, Papa.

ESPENSHADE (*turning to PENNY again*)Well, I always play safe in a trap. (*She inclines her head*



*again.*) I think it's the only thing to do, unless you're a professional. But this looked like a pretty good lie. (*She nods again; and* MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns her head and looks keenly at him.*) And I thought if I just played it regular, I might be able to get away with it.

PENNY

But you weren't.

ESPENSHADE

Exactly. There's a mental hazard, you know, in a trap—even when everything's all right. So, of course, the minute I swung full at it, I threw myself off balance. And in trying to shift my weight quickly, to keep from falling, my right foot kind of twisted under me.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*very casually, and looking away off*)

It's a wonder to me you haven't turned on your ankle long ago, the way you're always hopping out of that car of yours.

[*He leans forward carefully to dispose of some ashes, and* PENNY *gets up smoothly.*

ESPENSHADE

I wasn't hopping out of the car when I did *this*.

PENNY

He was trying to get out of a trap, Mother.

[*She turns to the mantelpiece mirror.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, he shouldn't get *into* traps; and then he wouldn't have to be trying to get *out* of them.

PENNY (*moving up towards the doorway*)

I think I'll go, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

So early?

PENNY (*wandering towards the console at the back*)

I've been here practically all day.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*rising*)

It's only half-past nine.

[*She follows PENNY up towards the back.*]

PENNY (*looking at the flowers on the console*)

Where did you get *these* little flowers?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*at PENNY's right*)

The florist put them in with the roses.

PENNY

Aren't they pretty.

[*ANNA appears in the doorway, coming from the front, with the roses.*]

ANNA

Here are the roses, Miss Penny.

PENNY

Oh, thanks, Anna.

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am.

PENNY

But you shouldn't have brought me so many, Anna!

ANNA

Is that too many?

PENNY

Two or three would have been plenty.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, what does it matter, Penny, there are plenty of them out there.

PENNY

But I don't think that's fair, Mother!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, nonsense!

[*The MAID withdraws, towards the back.*]

PENNY

No, I won't take so many. (*handing back four roses to her mother.*) Just take these four; and you can put them in with these little white flowers, they'll look lovely with them. And that'll leave me a half dozen; and that's plenty for me.

[*MRS. ESPENSHADE turns to the console to arrange the roses. And PENNY moves towards the archway.*]

ESPENSHADE

Do you want me to ring for the car, Penny, and drive you over home?

PENNY

No, please don't bother, thanks; I can get a taxi downstairs.

ESPENSHADE

When are you going to Maine?

PENNY

I haven't decided yet, really.

ESPENSHADE

I think you'll have to decide pretty soon, by the way it feels outside tonight.

PENNY

You going to Meadow Beach again this summer, Mother?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't know, whether I am or not; I haven't thought about it, one way or another.

ESPENSHADE

I'm a little tired of the seashore, personally; I mean, as an all-summer proposition. (PENNY *shifts her eyes to him; and* MRS. ESPENSHADE *listens.*) It's all right for week-ends; or if the weather is especially bad. But, for myself, I think I'd like to break it up a little this year—take a jaunt somewhere else occasionally.

PENNY

You mean, the country?

ESPENSHADE

Well, the country, or the mountains—(PENNY *looks at her mother again; and her mother turns and meets her eyes.*) I don't care, as long as it's a change. There's a friend of mine out at the Club that's always giving me quite a line about some place up in the mountains; he's got a lodge of some kind up there.

PENNY

In the Adirondacks?

ESPENSHADE

No, I think it's in Pennsylvania somewhere, as a matter of fact. (PENNY *and her mother exchange looks again.*) I just don't remember where.

PENNY (*with a final, and rather resentful look at her father, and moving out into the hallway*)

There are a lot of those Pennsylvania resorts. Well, I must be going, Mother, I'll see you soon.

[ESPENSHADE *turns to the little end-table at the left of the couch and picks up a magazine.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving to the archway, still holding the roses that PENNY gave her*)

Good-bye.

PENNY

Good-bye. And thanks for the roses.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Don't leave them in the taxicab, now.

PENNY

I won't. Good-bye.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Good-bye. (*The outer door is heard to close; and there is a pause. Then she turns, and, with a glance at her husband, moves carefully across above the couch.*) Who's the friend that has the place up in the mountains?

ESPENSHADE (*very casually*)

He's a fellow that makes up our foursome sometimes on Saturdays.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And what does he want *you* to do, buy a place up there, too?

ESPENSHADE

No, he just wants me to come up there sometime for a

week-end. He says there's some very fine golf near there; and he says he thinks I'd like it.

*[She comes to a stop at a point slightly to the left of the couch, and just above it.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It's near Eaglesmere I suppose, isn't it?

ESPENSHADE (*half over his left shoulder, and leaning back*)

I don't think it's near *any* place, really—from the way he describes it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I see that advertised a lot in the papers.

ESPENSHADE

Well, I don't think this is near any *resort*: I think it's just the forest primeval. He says he built it about six years ago. And he says it's the *one* place in the world where you can be absolutely alone.

*[She looks at him piercingly.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Doesn't his family go up there with him?

ESPENSHADE

He *hasn't* any family that I know of. At least, I've never heard him speak of any.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No people at all?

ESPENSHADE

I don't think so. I think he told me once that he was brought up in an orphanage. I don't think he has any people at all.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It's a wonder he'd want such a solitary place.

ESPENSHADE

Well, I imagine he's had a pretty tough time of it. He gives that impression, anyway. (*He fixes his eyes away off, and she continues to fix hers on him.*) You know, there's something *about* people with that kind of background; it seems to get into the personality—a kind of wistfulness. I often watch *him* when his face is in repose; and, for some reason or other, he always makes me a little sad. I imagine he's gotten hurt a lot in his life by people; and he very likely wants to get away from them as far as possible.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It's a wonder he'd ask *you* up there.

ESPENSHADE

I suppose he gets lonesome—like everybody else. He *says* he feels the *remoteness* of the place once in a while; but that it's so wonderful up there that he's never been able to think of not going back there again the next year. He says there's a little mountain road runs past the place; and he says as you walk along it in the evening, it looks exactly like old silver in the moonlight. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *slowly raises her eyes to some far-off moon.*) And he says you hear those little mountain streams at night, just like voices in the darkness. And he says there's always a fragrance up there, like wild honeysuckle. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *quietly presses the roses to her bosom, and several of the petals flutter to the floor. And ESPENSHADE pulls himself together and gets up.*) Of course, I may not go up there at all. (*He drifts across to the center table and presses the fire out of his cigarette.*) It's just a small



place—a cabin, really; he's shown me a couple of snapshots of it different times; I think there'd only be room for the two of us.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*still entranced*)

I think that might be very nice for you.

ESPENSHADE (*moving up towards the back and across above her towards the hallway*)

You don't think you'd mind if I didn't come down to the Shore every week-end?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not if you prefer it up there.

ESPENSHADE (*coming to a slow stop at the right end of the couch*)

Of course I'd come down there occasionally. But I've never *been* to the mountains much—and I think it might be interesting.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*looking away off*)

Those sounds at night in the mountains are unearthly.

ESPENSHADE (*also looking straight ahead*)

That's what *he's* always talking about.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And that *fragrance* of wild honeysuckle.

[*The curtain starts to descend slowly, and she presses the rosès closer to her breast, causing additional petals to flutter to the floor.*]

END OF ACT TWO



## ACT THREE



## ACT THREE

### SCENE I

*Two months later, on a Sunday evening around eight-thirty.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE *is standing at the upper window fanning herself with her handkerchief and reading some notes. After a slight pause the maid passes the doorway, coming from the back; and* MRS. ESPENSHADE *folds the note paper.*

PENNY (*out in the hallway*)

Hello, Anna.

ANNA

Oh, hello, Miss Penny!

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *steps to the desk and puts the note paper in her bag.*

PENNY

I'm glad to see that you've survived this awful heat we've been having.

ANNA

Oh, hasn't it been terrible!

PENNY

Perfectly dreadful. Is Mother in here?

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am, she's right there.

[*And* PENNY *appears in the archway.*

PENNY

Mother! What time did you get in?

*[She starts across; and the maid passes along the hallway, going towards the back.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

About an hour ago.

PENNY

And why didn't you let me know you were coming?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I wanted to give you a little surprise.

PENNY

Well, you've certainly succeeded. *(She kisses her.)* I very nearly didn't get your message at all. How are you?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm very well.

PENNY

You're *looking* perfectly marvelous, you really are, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm sorry I can't say the same for *you*.

PENNY *(turning away, to the chair at the left of the center table)*

Well, the heat here these past two weeks has been *simply* devastating: I don't know how any of us has survived it. *[She sits down.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE *(moving forward at the right of the desk chair)*

I imagine it's been pretty bad everywhere, from what I read.

PENNY (*getting a cigarette from a box on the table*)

Was it bad at the Shore?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Not particularly.

PENNY

What did you do, have dinner down there before you left?

[*She lights her cigarette.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, we left there at four and had dinner when we got up here, over at Dexter's.

[*She sits in the desk chair.*]

PENNY (*disposing of the match-stem*)

I went over to the Belgrave for dinner; I didn't want the house all heated up with cooking. And Edie Simpson was there, and *insisted* that I come up to her apartment for a while. But it was so hot I decided to go back home. And fortunately I did, or I wouldn't have got your message till late tonight.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

The girl at the house said you'd just gone out when I called.

PENNY

I left just about seven.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Isn't that a new girl over at your house?

PENNY

Yes; I had to get rid of that other one.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I thought I didn't recognize her voice.



PENNY

I just couldn't *stand* any more of her everlasting whining about Punchy. If she only took him to the corner, she came back with a whole list of things that he'd done to her,—or to somebody else. And I believe she made *up* half of them; because when I'd question the child about them, he simply didn't know *what* I was talking about. She came in in a perfect tantrum the Saturday she left and said that he'd *kicked* her,—all the way back from the park. Which was a perfect falsehood, of course,—because whatever *else* Punchy does, he does *not* *kick* people. And I told her so. And she flounced out of the room and up the stairs. And the next thing I knew I saw her going down the side walk of the house with her things. (*turning to get rid of some ashes.*) And I was glad to see her go. (MRS. ESPENSHADE *gets up and moves across to the lower window.*) I don't know *how* this new one'll turn out; but at least she hasn't accused Punchy of kicking her yet.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You're very fortunate to be able to *get* girls these days.

PENNY

I suppose so. But after some of the ones I've had *lately*, I wonder if I am.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning from the window, and glancing at her wrist-watch*)

What time have you, Penny? (*continuing up and across above the table towards the doorway.*) I think this watch of mine is slow, or fast or something.

PENNY

A quarter of nine.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

This must be right, then.

PENNY (MRS. ESPENSHADE *looks out into the hallway, toward the front*)

Are you expecting someone?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Only your father.

PENNY

Isn't he in his room?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving forward, at the extreme right*)

I haven't the faintest idea *where* your father is at this present moment of time.

PENNY

Well, he drove you up from the Shore this afternoon, didn't he?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No; Mrs. Wentz drove me up from the Shore this afternoon. And she's going to drive me down there again to-morrow afternoon.

[*She moves across towards the left, between the couch and the coffee-table.*]

PENNY

Well, Papa was down at the Shore over the week-end, wasn't he?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming to a stop in the middle of the room*)

I haven't *seen* your father since I left here the seventeenth of last month. And I don't think many other people have seen him, either,—at least over the week-ends.

PENNY

You don't think he's started that other business again, do you? I mean, you talked to him that night after *I* left here, didn't you?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*continuing on across above the table and down towards the lower window*)

Really, Penny, I think you should go back to your husband with as much haste as possible. I think you're much too unsuspecting to be going about unattended.

PENNY

Well, you *did* talk to him that night, didn't you, Mother?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I *told* you that night that I had to have *facts* before I talked to your father.

PENNY

Well, it seems to *me* you *had* enough of them, from what you told *me*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning from the window*)

But I had to have *proof* of my facts. (*moving up towards the back and on across again towards the hallway.*) You can't just make statements without being able to substantiate them. You must have a witness,—that's willing to swear to the truth of them.

PENNY

Well, have you got your witness?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I have my witness. And I have my facts, too. That's what I'm doing up here tonight.

[*She glances out into the hallway again.*]

PENNY

Does Papa *know* you were coming up here tonight?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No; I thought I'd give *him* a little surprise, too. (*drifting back from the archway.*) I understand this is about the time he gets back from the mountains every Sunday night.

PENNY

Do you think he's really been going *up* there over the week-ends, Mother?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming to a stop in the middle of the room*)

He left here for the *first* week-end the day after *I* left for Meadow Beach. And he's spent every week-end *since* up there.

[*She continues on across to the upper side of the desk.*

PENNY

Did the witness tell you that?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*opening her bag and taking out the note paper*)

Yes. He picked the lady friend up at her offices on the afternoon of Saturday, July the eighteenth; and *I* left for Meadow Beach on Friday, the seventeenth. So, you see, he didn't lose very much time. (*consulting the notes.*) And they drove straight to Eaglesmere, to the Clifton Hotel. And *he* registered there; and then drove her out to the cabin. And *stayed* there till they drove back to the hotel on Sunday night to let *him* check out. And then they drove back to town. And that's been the program the three week-ends since.

[*She proceeds to put the notes back into the bag.*

PENNY

How did the detective know they were going to Eaglesmere, Mother?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She followed them in her car.

PENNY

Is the detective a woman, Mother?

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *looks at her.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes. I thought he'd be less likely to suspect a woman.

PENNY

And what did she do, follow them up there every weekend?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*with a shade of annoyance*)

Yes. She has her own car, and that's the kind of work she likes I suppose.

PENNY

I wonder how she knew that Papa didn't come back to his room in the hotel on Saturday nights.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

She got a room on the same floor I understand, and watched for him.

PENNY

All night?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*increasingly annoyed, and moving forward at the right of the desk*)

Apparently. That's part of that kind of work I suppose.

PENNY

It must have cost you a lot of money, didn't it, Mother?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't know; I haven't had the bill yet.

*[She pretends to be occupied with something on the desk: and PENNY turns thoughtfully to press the fire out of her cigarette on the table tray. Then she suddenly turns again to her mother.]*

PENNY

Well, listen, Mother—you *are* definitely going to speak to Papa tonight about this thing, aren't you? Because I think if he knows you *know* about it, it'll put a stop to it. I think all you have to do is just to warn him.

*[MRS. ESPENSHADE turns quietly to her.]*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You're such a sham, Penny;—(PENNY *sits looking blankly at her.*) and such a fool.

*[She drifts up towards the back of the room.]*

PENNY

Why, what do you mean, Mother?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving across at the back, towards the right*)

You're more sentimental than your husband and I put together.

PENNY

Why, what has sentimentality to do with that?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning, in the middle of the room*)

It has to do with self-interest. And I've discovered that the two of them are never very far apart.

*[She moves towards the left again.]*

PENNY

I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to her*)

I'm talking about *you*:—and your fear that I'll divorce your father. And that your posturing at the expense of your husband'll be made a little less secure.

[*She turns away, towards the upper window.*]

PENNY

I'm not posturing at the expense of my husband at all.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning suddenly back to her again*)

Then, what *are* you doing?—when you're holding cheap the fidelity and efforts of a man that's giving you a better life than you could possibly earn for yourself.

[*She moves away towards the lower window.*]

PENNY

I've simply been stating things that I *believe* in.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning upon her, with a note of anger*)

You do *not* believe in them! And I don't believe you when you say you do. For if you did you wouldn't be practically urging *me* now to try to hang on to a man that's outgrown me.

[*She starts to move up and across at the back.*]

PENNY

I don't believe Papa *has* outgrown you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Then, it must be that *I've* outgrown *him*. For it's got to be one way or the other,—according to these statements that you say you believe in. (*stopping and turning, be-*



*hind the sofa.* No two people can react in the same way to a given experience, you know. And your father and I have had nearly twenty-eight years of this one. (*continuing towards the hallway.*) So why try to defer the inevitable.

PENNY

Because I don't think it *is* inevitable.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning to her*)

You mean, we should try to grow old together, and become cases of arrested development?

PENNY

Well, I think you should at least have *said* something.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving back towards the center of the room*)

And to what end could I have said anything, will you tell me that?

PENNY

Because I think you might have stopped it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And why should I *wish* to stop it, under the circumstances?

PENNY

Well, it seems to *me* that *anything* would have been better than to have let it come to *this*, Mother.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

The very fact that it should have been *necessary* to say anything, should have been enough to let me know what my position was.

PENNY

Well, you certainly must have loved being a martyr, that's all *I've* got to say.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, I think *you* were more or less responsible for my silence, Penny.

PENNY

Well, you were very foolish to have allowed me to be.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, it wasn't out of any consideration for you, I assure you. I'd always felt that a certain disillusionment about your father would be about the best thing that could possibly happen to *you*. But when my own disillusionment about him occurred, I found myself, ironically enough, remembering some of the speeches you'd been making around here,—and appreciating their application to my own case. Of course, my pride was terribly hurt at first. But they say we find ourselves in our tribulations. And, sure enough, I soon began to discover that I wasn't nearly so heart-broken as I was romantic. And I actually began to follow your father's romance with a certain interest.

*[She drifts across above the table towards the upper window.]*

PENNY

I think *that's* probably the *real* reason you've never said anything.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Maybe it is.

PENNY

And I suppose you'll go to his *wedding, too*, if he ever marries her.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I was enjoying the last meal of the condemned.

PENNY

Well, it must have been something.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

For I was never so romantic at any time, or so sentimental, either, as to forget that my marriage was dead. And that as soon as I could assemble the necessary material, I would have to bury it. And that's what I'm doing up here tonight—waiting to discuss with your father the time and place of the services.

*[She moves forward to the upper side of the desk.]*

PENNY

Is that what you wanted *me* here for tonight?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*opening her bag*)

No,—as a matter of fact, I didn't expect you here tonight at all. When I telephoned you a while ago I simply wanted to tell you that I'd be here for luncheon tomorrow; and that there was something I wanted to discuss with you.

PENNY

*My* marriage, I suppose?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Exactly.

PENNY (*leaning down and picking up her bag from the floor*)

I thought so.

[*She gets up and starts across below the table and up towards the doorway.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I've had four letters from your husband in the past three weeks; and their tone is completely consistent with his attitude here a couple of months ago when he told me that he was *not* coming back to you till there was an understanding between you.

PENNY (*turning to her*)

On *his* terms, of course.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

On certain of them, yes.

PENNY (*moving back a step or two towards her mother,—and with a shade of defiance*)

And what *are* the certain of them, Mother? I'd like to hear them.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, the first one is that you deliver that child of his to the place in Maine within a week. (PENNY *is audibly amused, and starts down through the middle of the room and across below the couch towards the mantelpiece.*) That's what he says.

PENNY

By Parcel Post, I suppose?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, you're invited to come *with* him if you like.

PENNY (*turning at the right of the couch*)

Well, that's very generous of him I'm sure. But he didn't happen to mention how I'm going to get *up* there, did he?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No.

PENNY

Because he hasn't sent me any money, you know, since he left here.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*quietly, and looking at one of the letters*)

He was probably counting on Punchy *kicking* you up there. (PENNY *moves up towards the archway, looking darkly at her mother.*) But, in any case, he refuses to allow that child to stay in this hot city any longer.

PENNY (*crossing back towards the center of the room*)

The child needn't have *been* in the city at all this summer.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I know what you're going to tell me.

PENNY

Well, I hope *he* didn't forget to tell you about sending the bill for Doctor Bajarian's summer camp back unopened.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He will not *allow* the child to *go* to Doctor Bajarian's camp.

PENNY (*turning away*)

*He* will not allow!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And he will not allow him to go back to his school again this fall. And he insists upon deciding just what school the child *will* go to.

PENNY

Well, his insistences haven't been very successful in the past.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, that's what he says here in these letters.

PENNY (*moving over towards her mother again*)

And what are his *other* demands, I'm sure there must be others?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I think those are the most important ones.

PENNY

I'm disappointed: I thought at least he'd threaten to divorce me.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He's not making any threats, Penny: I think these letters are extremely moderate.

PENNY (*turning away*)

And extremely original, too, I'm sure.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*extending the letters*)

You can read them if you like.

PENNY (*furiously*)

Well, I don't want to read them, thanks. For I know just about what's in them.

[*She looks away.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*quietly*)

Did you know that he's going to demand the custody of your child,—(PENNY *looks sharply at her.*) if you make

it necessary for him to divorce you? He's genuinely alarmed over that child's upbringing.

PENNY (*moving a little towards her*)

And I wonder if it's occurred to him that *I* might divorce *him* first,—on the grounds of desertion.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He would *still* demand the custody of the child.

PENNY

On the grounds that I am not a fit person to bring him up, I suppose?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

That's the grounds that such demands are usually made on.

PENNY

Well, I'm afraid he'll need one of your female *witnesses*, Mother, to establish any such claim as that.

[*She turns and starts for the archway.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*with ominous steadiness*)

He already *has* such a witness, Penny.

[PENNY *stops and turns.* And MRS. ESPENSHADE *holds her eye for a pause.*]

PENNY

Really?

[*She comes back into the room a step or two, still holding her mother's eye.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And her testimony against *you* might be very conclusive, if you're ever fool enough to let it come to that. You've



held me cheap long enough, through the attitude of that child; and I'll welcome an opportunity to put a stop to it.

[ESPENSHADE *quietly appears in the doorway and stands. And there is a further pause of physical stillness.*

ESPENSHADE

What's going on? (PENNY *turns, slightly startled, and looks at him. But* MRS. ESPENSHADE *remains perfectly still.*) What's the matter?

PENNY (*sweeping towards the door and past him*)

There's nothing at all the matter with *me*! Mother is simply distributing a few divorces here this evening: so if you wait around a while you may get one of them.

[ESPENSHADE *stands looking after her; and* MRS. ESPENSHADE *moves slowly forward at the right of the desk chair and over to the lower window. Then the outer door is heard to close, definitively, and* ESPENSHADE *turns and looks toward his wife.*

ESPENSHADE (*coming into the room*)

What's the matter with Penny?

[*He sets down a traveling bag at the back.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I've just been scolding her about keeping that child of hers in this hot city.

ESPENSHADE (*coming forward to the table*)

How is it she hasn't gone up to Maine?

[*He tosses his topcoat over the back of the chair at the left of the table, and puts his hat on the chair.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning from the window*)

She says she's tired of Maine.

ESPENSHADE

Is Vernon up there?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, *he's* been up there since the twentieth of June.

ESPENSHADE

I should think she'd be glad to go most anywhere to get out of this heat. (*crossing down to her.*) And what are *you* doing up in this hot city, Ollie?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*without moving*)

I was wondering how *you* were prospering.

ESPENSHADE

Very well. How have *you* been prospering?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

*Penny* says I look marvelous.

ESPENSHADE

So you do. (*She smiles mysteriously.*) You're just as pretty as ever. (*He kisses her suddenly on the right cheek; then straightens up and stands looking at her again.*) What are you smiling at?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'm thinking of the persistence of habit.

ESPENSHADE

What do you mean?  
[*She holds his eye for a second.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Your hair needs brushing back on the left side, as usual.

ESPENSHADE (*turning to the mirror over the desk, and brushing his hair back*)

I had my hat off in the car; and there was quite a breeze. (*stepping down to his former position.*) That better? [*She inclines her head.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

They say it keeps growing after we're dead. (*He laughs a little.*) That's what they say.

ESPENSHADE (*laughing*)

Well, that's a comforting little thought.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving to the desk chair*)

Please sit down, Paul; there's something I'd like to talk to you about.

[*She sits down, rather thoughtfully.*]

ESPENSHADE (*turning away slowly*)

Sure. (*He continues on across below the center table and up towards the back.*) Do you mind if I put these things in my room first?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

There's no hurry.

[*He picks up the traveling bag, and then comes forward to gather up his topcoat and hat.*]

ESPENSHADE

When did you come up from the Shore, today?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I left there at four o'clock.

ESPENSHADE

On the train?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, Mabel drove me up.

ESPENSHADE

Has Mabel been down there with you?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes; she's going to drive me down again tomorrow.

ESPENSHADE (*going towards his bedroom*)

Well, that's fine. I'm glad you've had company down there. (*He disappears.*) I'd thought of coming down there next week-end if you want me.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I suppose you've been up to that place in the mountains these past three week-ends, haven't you?

ESPENSHADE

Yes; and it's perfectly wonderful up there, Ollie, it really is. I must tell you about it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I'm anxious to hear.

ESPENSHADE

You know, I had an idea from the description that that fellow's been giving me of that place he has up there that it was more or less of a makeshift kind of thing. But you ought to see it; it's just like something you'd see on a picture post-card. And as comfortable and convenient as any little house. (*coming out of the bedroom, wearing a lounging jacket, and reaching into his pocket for a cigarette as he crosses down towards his wife.*) I got the surprise of my life when I saw it. And the course up there is simply wonderful. *I've* never played such golf in my life, really. And do you know what I attribute it to?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No.

ESPENSHADE

The atmosphere. (*She inclines her head knowingly, and he strikes a match.*) You've never felt anything like it in your life.

[*He lights the cigarette.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

There ought to be a lot of it up that way.

ESPENSHADE (*turning to the center table to get rid of the match-stem*)

No, but I mean the stimulation of it. You just *never get tired*. (*turning to her again.*) And, of course, outside of keeping your eye on the ball, that's about the most important thing in golf—that you *don't* get tired. Because the minute ever you do, you begin to notice it in your shots. Do you know what I've been doing that course in, Ollie? And it's a regular eighteen-hole course, mind you. And a pretty tough one, too. And do you know what I've been doing it in?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*tonelessly*)

Yes.

ESPENSHADE

I mean, do you know the number of shots I've been going around the whole course in, these past three week-ends?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*inclining her head slightly*)

Yes—I do.

[*There is something of a pause; and he stands looking at her, and then he smiles indulgently.*]

ESPENSHADE

Why, how would you know, Ollie?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Because I've been keeping your score these past three week-ends. (*He simply stands looking at her.*) And I know all about the kind of game you've been playing. And whom you've been playing it with; and for how long. So I hope you won't be tiresome, now, and start explaining how you've been going to her for a series of osteopathic treatments. For I've lost interest in the game; and Mabel Wentz and I would like to do a bit of traveling. (*She turns smoothly to the desk to pick up her bag; and he turns and moves slowly across below the table, pausing on the way to tap some cigarette ashes on to the table tray.*) I suppose you want to marry her, don't you? You could have hardly expected a situation like this to continue indefinitely.

ESPENSHADE (*continuing on up towards the hallway*)

I don't know what to say to you, Ollie.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*getting her handkerchief from the bag*)

I think you've been telling me all I need to know, Paul, for a long time.

ESPENSHADE (*glancing unseeingly out into the hallway*)

I suppose so.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

So that I've had plenty of time to consider it.

ESPENSHADE (*drifting forward at the extreme right*)

Well, I hope it hasn't hurt you too much, that's all.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No, I'm afraid it hasn't.



ESPENSHADE

I'm glad of that.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I have a daughter that appears to be wiser in her generation than *I* was; even if her wisdom isn't exactly part of her experience yet. And she's repeatedly assured me here that marriage was simply a habit. (ESPENSHADE *considers the tip of his cigarette.*) Which I accepted pretty much as I've accepted most of her other pronouncements. But I'm afraid you've completely vindicated her, Paul,—by breaking the habit *for* me; and letting me see that there really wasn't very much left of our marriage but *my* pride. So I assure you you're quite free now to stand up again any time you like and swear to be faithful unto death to somebody else. (*He turns and looks in the mirror.*) I don't think you'll have very much difficulty persuading someone else to believe you. (*He tilts his head slightly to the right, and, almost through force of habit, looks at the hair over his left temple.*) Your hair hasn't really gone back very much further than it had when I took you.

[*He turns, smiling, and moves across to the coffee-table.*]

ESPENSHADE

You're being very sporting about this, Ollie, I must say.  
[*He taps some ashes on to the tray.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Maybe so. (*He sits down on the couch.*) I remember a saying that I heard one time, or read some place—that the art of living was probably the art of letting go gracefully. So maybe that's what I'm trying to do.



ESPENSHADE

You know, I've often *wondered* whether you knew about this. And sometimes I almost persuaded myself that you didn't. But, as long as you did, I won't be tiresome. And, of course, it's got to be whatever way you want it, Ollie. And that's the way *I* want it, too,—it really is. (*There is a pause.*) I suppose Penny knows about it, too, doesn't she?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Of course. (*He smiles ruefully.*) I suppose everybody knows about it.

ESPENSHADE

Funny,—the way a man'll get into this kind of thing,—so deep that there's just no getting *out* of it. I used to ask myself once in a while just why I was *letting* myself get into it so deep.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Were you ever able to find an answer to that?

ESPENSHADE

Well, the only thing I could ascribe it to was the fact that I *needed* someone.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

And I didn't understand you perhaps.

ESPENSHADE (*leaning forward and pressing the fire out of the cigarette*)

No, I don't think it was so much that, as it was that I didn't understand *you*. At least a certain *quality* about you. I don't think I've *ever* understood it, really.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What is it?

ESPENSHADE

Well,—it's hard to describe, Ollie;—it's an intangible kind of thing—that I doubt *anybody* could describe very well. But you always seemed a peculiarly *innocent* kind of woman, for some reason or other. I remember the day we were married,—when we got back from the church, and were standing out under the trees at your mother's place; and you still had your bridal dress on.—I couldn't get that out of my mind. (*She touches her handkerchief to her left eye.*) You looked so unreal to me that day,—so absolutely unphysical. I kept saying to myself, “I shouldn't have married this girl; it isn't right. I'm not good enough for her. And *no* man is good enough for her. She should have been allowed to just pass through her life as a kind of symbol of the romance that every man'd like to be worthy of.” (*She turns her head slowly and looks off through the lower window to the Phaeacian Glades. And he leans forward reflectively.*) And I remember some lines of a poem kept coming into my mind,—a poem called “Sibylle” that I had to translate at school one time—something about—

“I see thee standing in a maiden light,  
Beyond the stealth of time; and all alone—  
The secret quest of ev'ry errant knight,  
Yet none may ever know thee as his own.

(MRS. ESPENSHADE *has to raise her handkerchief to her eyes again; and the curtain starts to descend very slowly.*)

Oh, Wisdom's Child, how did'st thou learn that love  
Fulfilled is but the end thereof!"

*[She suddenly buries her face in her handkerchief and  
weeps, as*

THE CURTAIN COVERS HER

## ACT THREE

### SCENE II

*The curtain rises again on the Espensshade sitting room, some months later; on a Saturday afternoon about two-thirty. The maid hurries in from the hallway, carrying a small box of flowers, tied with a very fancy ribbon. She crosses directly up to the bedroom door and knocks.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*from inside*)

Yes, what is it, Anna?

ANNA

Here are the flowers, Mrs. Espensshade.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, fine! Just put them there somewhere for a minute, Anna, I'll be right out.

ANNA (*turning and coming forward to the center table*)

Yes, Ma'am.

[*The hall buzzer sounds; and the maid sets the flower-box down and hurries out to answer it. And MRS. ESPENSHADE emerges suddenly from the bedroom, wearing a dark blue dress, and fastening on some bracelets.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Is that the buzzer, Anna?

ANNA (*just going out into the hallway*)

Yes, Ma'am, I'm just going out to answer it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It's probably Mrs. Wentz. Where did you put the flowers, Anna?

ANNA (*from the hallway*)

They're right there on the table, Mrs. Espenshade.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns and sees the flower-box, and crosses to it immediately, gathering it up and hurrying back into the bedroom.*

MRS. WENTZ (*in the hallway*)

Hello, Anna.

ANNA

Oh, how do you do, Mrs. Wentz.

MRS. WENTZ

You've been keeping well?

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am, pretty well, thanks.

MRS. WENTZ

That's good.

[*The front door closes.*

ANNA

I was just *out* here to this door a minute ago to get some flowers that Mrs. Espenshade ordered.

MRS. WENTZ (*appearing in the archway*)

I never saw anybody get so many flowers.

ANNA (*following her in*)

Yes, she certainly loves flowers.

MRS. WENTZ (*wandering across the room*)

Where *is* she, Anna, getting dressed?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'll be out there in a minute, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

All right.

[ANNA notices the absence of the flower-box from the table, and takes a step or two towards the bedroom door.

ANNA

Did you take the flowers, Mrs. Espenshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, I have them here, Anna.

ANNA (*turning towards the doorway*)

Oh, all right, then: I noticed they weren't here on the table.

[*She withdraws, towards the back, and* MRS. WENTZ *moves down to the desk chair. But just then* MRS. ESPENSHADE *hurries out of the bedroom, with an open letter in her hand.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*with a glance toward* MRS. WENTZ, *and stepping towards the hallway*)

I'll be right with you, Mabel. (*She glances after the MAID, and then turns and hurries across at the back.*)

I can't tell you how much I appreciate your coming right over, Mabel; I was almost frantic till you called me back. I was afraid I might not be able to get hold of you at all.

MRS. WENTZ

I was downtown all morning.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, so Clara told me. (*turning and starting back towards the bedroom door again.*) But I was afraid you

might not get back in time to go *with* me. (*She closes the bedroom door.*) You came over in your car, didn't you?

MRS. WENTZ

Yes, it's downstairs.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*stepping towards the archway again*)

Because we'll need it.

MRS. WENTZ

Where are we going, Ollie?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, now, wait till I tell you. (*She glances into the hallway again, and once more hurries back to* MRS. WENTZ.) These two out here have had their ears to the ground ever since Paul left here, you know; that's the reason I didn't say anything to you over the telephone. But this special delivery came this morning about nine o'clock from Maine. And, of course, as soon as I saw the post-mark I thought it was from Vernon. Because I haven't had a *line* from *her*, you know, ever since she's been up there.

MRS. WENTZ

From Penny, you mean?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, she's up there with him. I don't think she's been speaking to me after certain things I said to her the last time she was here. But, anyway, she's up there with him, thanks to me, and having quite a second honeymoon, according to this letter.

MRS. WENTZ

When are they coming back?



MRS. ESPENSHADE

On the first, she says in this letter. But she also says that Vernon had a letter from his aunt the day before yesterday telling him that the hair-dresser that she goes to was telling her the day before that the nurse that works for Doctor Hilton had been in to have her hair and eyebrows done for Doctor Hilton's wedding. And that she had said that the Doctor was back from the mountains, and was to be married on the twenty-fourth at five o'clock in the afternoon, at a little church somewhere out beyond Cloverton, called The Little Church in the Woods. And Vernon's aunt was wondering if Penny and I knew about it. (*There is a pause; and MRS. WENTZ stands looking steadily at her.*) And today is the twenty-fourth. I mean, it's today.

MRS. WENTZ (*still uncomprehending*)

Well, that isn't—

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away suddenly and coming forward and across below the table and up through the center of the room*)

Now, I know you're going to try to talk me out of it, Mable! But I've been promising myself this for a long time.

MRS. WENTZ

You've been promising yourself what, Ollie?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

This—to see it through to the end: and I intend to do it.

MRS. WENTZ (*moving incredulously towards the table*)

And you expect me to drive you out to Paul's wedding?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I thought you might—you know I'm not able to drive myself.

MRS. WENTZ (*crossing below the table towards the right*)

But I'm *not* a contributor to delinquency, darling.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving towards the left, at the back*)

I have a very good reason for wanting to go out there.

MRS. WENTZ (*turning to her*)

You want to drain the cup of martyrdom to the dregs, I suppose.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

You can call it whatever you like, but I'm going just the same. And if you won't take me I'll go myself.

MRS. WENTZ (*crossing up to the table*)

But, Ollie, do you realize what it is that you're asking me to do?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, of course I do.

MRS. WENTZ

To drive you out to your own husband's wedding?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I want to prove to myself that I am completely untouched by this entire thing.

MRS. WENTZ

But, Ollie, you haven't gone so *completely* out of your mind as not to realize that that isn't the interpretation that'll be put upon it by anybody that *sees* you out there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

No one need see me out there at all.

MRS. WENTZ

How can you *avoid* being seen?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

The place is nearly thirty miles from here, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

Even so, *somebody* is bound to see you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But I'm going to wear a *veil*, darling!

MRS. WENTZ (*raising her hand and turning away and down to the right again*)

Oh, well, now, *that's* going *entirely* too far!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But it's just a little summer veil, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

About six yards long, I imagine,—and fastened with orange blossoms.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, anyway, no one knows *me* away out at Cloverton.

MRS. WENTZ (*crossing again to the table*)

But it's not the local people that'll *be* there, Ollie; it'll be people from town here.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

The thing is going to be very private, Mabel,—and very informal; for I called the church out there as soon as I got this letter this morning.

MRS. WENTZ (*turning away, to her left*)

You'll be the laughing-stock of the entire city, Ollie, I'm telling you.

[*She crosses to the back of the sofa.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*moving towards her*)

I pretended I'd been invited to the wedding but didn't quite know how to get out there. And the woman explained. And then I asked her if she thought I'd have any difficulty being admitted if I were a bit late. And she said, no, that she didn't think so,—that she understood it was to be a very simple wedding, with just a few friends present. And that, anyway, the church was always open to the public for prayer and meditation from nine in the morning till seven in the evening.

MRS. WENTZ (*turning away further to the right*)

Well, that isn't what *you're* going out there for.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, I simply asked her about getting there late to see if we could get there early. I thought if we got out there around four, we might just slip in before anybody else got there, and sit away over to the side at the back.

MRS. WENTZ

It's the most preposterous thing I've ever heard in my life, it really is.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But why *should* it be, Mabel!

MRS. WENTZ (*coming directly back to her*)

Oh, don't be silly, Ollie! You know perfectly well that no woman in the world has ever gone to her own husband's wedding.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away, and down towards the lower window*)

He's *not* my husband.

MRS. WENTZ (*above the table*)

Well, he *was* your husband!—and till very recently, too! And you know just as well as *I* do that it's a perfectly incredible thing for any woman to do. They may go to their divorced husband's *funerals* occasionally, but they do *not* go to their weddings.

[*She goes down towards the right.*]

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning from the window*)

I've *told* you why I'm doing it.

MRS. WENTZ

I know, I heard you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

To prove to myself that I can let go gracefully.

MRS. WENTZ (*turning to her*)

And don't you think you could prove that a little more conclusively by staying quietly at home here today and ignoring the whole thing altogether? (*She moves up and across above the table to the desk, to get her bag. And MRS. ESPENSHADE moves across below the table and up towards the back.*) Seems to *me* that'd be a great deal more convincing way of showing a lack of interest in it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I have another reason for wanting to go out there today.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, I hope it's a better one than the others.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Everybody that has ever told me about this thing at all, has told me what a very nice person this woman is that he's taken up with. A rather pathetic poor thing they say, that apparently no one has ever looked at; and that has known nothing all her life but poverty and hard work. And this is her first wonder I suppose, and it's just been too much for her. And *he's* probably taken advantage of it and deceived her,—just as he deceived *me*. And I will *not* let him break her heart,—as he's broken mine.

MRS. WENTZ (*drifting forward at the left*)

Now, Paul hasn't broken your heart, Ollie, any more than *you've* broken *his*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning away, and touching her eyes*)

Well, this isn't any red-letter day for me, I can tell you that.

MRS. WENTZ

Maybe not. But you'll forget all about it, Ollie, when you're listening to that Spanish music down in Guatemala.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *turns suddenly and looks at her*.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I thought we were going to Honolulu.

MRS. WENTZ

So we are. But I thought you might like to stop off in the Canal Zone first and go up and see those Indians in Guatemala.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

What for?

MRS. WENTZ

Because their wedding ceremonies go on for months sometimes.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, I know you think I'm very silly, Mabel Wentz. But I don't think he should be *allowed* to ruin another woman's life.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, I don't see how you're going to stop it, Ollie, by simply appearing at his wedding.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, at least, I'll have satisfied myself that he's actually *married* her. (MRS. WENTZ *stands looking at her.*) And I'll never believe he did unless I see it. For I don't trust him anymore.

MRS. WENTZ (*crossing below the table towards the mantel-piece*)

All right, Ollie,—if it'll make you feel any better.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning quickly towards the bedroom*)

I only have to put my hat on.

[*But she just as suddenly changes her course and hurries over to the archway to press the button.*]

MRS. WENTZ (*glancing at her watch*)

But we'd better get started, it's nearly three o'clock. And it'll take us nearly an hour to get out there. What about dinner, do you want to come back to my place?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*coming away from the archway*)

I don't care.



MRS. WENTZ

Or would you rather go out to the Rock Garden?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

It doesn't matter. Don't you want to come back here?

MRS. WENTZ

Well, the only thing they have lovely music out at the Rock Garden in the evening.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I don't think I want to hear any music tonight, Mabel, if you don't mind.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, then, would you rather come back to my place?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Unless you'd rather come here.

MRS. WENTZ (*starting across below the center table towards the desk*)

Then, let's come back to *my* place.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*hurrying into the bedroom*)

I think that'd be better.

MRS. WENTZ (*getting out her spectacles*)

I'll call Clara. And I'll tell her we'll be there around seven sometime; that'll give us plenty of time to get back.

[*She sits down and starts to dial the number near-sightedly. And the maid comes into the room.*]

ANNA

Did you want something, Mrs. Wentz?

MRS. WENTZ

No, I think Mrs. Espensshade wants you for something, Anna.

ANNA (*turning to the bedroom door*)

Oh, does she?

MRS. WENTZ

She's just gone into the bedroom there.

ANNA

Did you want me, Mrs. Espensshade?

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*from the bedroom*)

Yes, will you tell Mrs. DeShon that I won't be back for dinner tonight, Anna.

ANNA (*withdrawing*)

Oh, all right, Mrs. Espensshade, I'll tell her.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Oh, and, Anna!

ANNA

Yes, Ma'am?

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'll take my key *with* me, so don't bother waiting up for me.

ANNA (*withdrawing*)

All right, I won't.

MRS. WENTZ (*into the telephone*)

Hello, Clara, this is Mrs. Wentz.—Clara, I'm bringing Mrs. Espensshade home for dinner with me tonight;—we'll be there sometime around seven.—All right, Clara.

(While she is speaking, MRS. ESPENSHADE appears from the bedroom, wearing a white halo hat with detachable veil, a white pocketbook and a corsage. She stands for a second, adjusting her white gloves and waiting for MRS. WENTZ to turn around. Which she does presently, after she has removed her glasses and stood up. Then she sees MRS. ESPENSHADE, and stops abruptly. They look at each other for a second,—and then MRS. WENTZ moves towards her with an almost threatening smoothness.) Now, listen, Ollie,—you are *not* going to wear that veil out there, or I simply will not go with you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Don't you like this veil?

MRS. WENTZ

You look *exactly* like an *emergency* bride.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*turning and moving forward to a point where she can see her reflection in the mantelpiece mirror*)

I think this is a very pretty veil.

MRS. WENTZ

I'm not saying anything *about* its prettiness; it's simply too competitive, that's all. And I will *not* go with you if you wear it.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*starting to remove the veil, as she turns to go back up to the bedroom*)

Well, it's detachable.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, you'd better detach it: unless you want them throwing rice at *you* as you go into the church.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I'll leave it here in my room.

MRS. WENTZ (*drifting towards the archway*)

And that *corsage* is a bit suspicious-looking, too, if you want my opinion.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Now, you *know* I always wear white flowers with a dark dress, Mabel.

MRS. WENTZ

I know. But that's a little more than just white flowers. I'd like to have been listening when you ordered it.

[MRS. ESPENSHADE *appears again and comes forward to look at herself.*

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Does that look better?

MRS. WENTZ

Well,—

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Well, now, *tell* me, Mabel, I want to know!

MRS. WENTZ

Well, you look a little less *involved* than you did before.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*touching her make-up*)

Do I look as though I'd been crying?

MRS. WENTZ (*turning towards the doorway*)

No, you don't.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*crossing back to the table, and opening her bag*)

Because my eyes *feel* as though I do. I must see if I have my key.

MRS. WENTZ

I'm sure you'll look much better than the bride.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

Yes, here it is. Well, I wonder I look half as good as I do, when I get thinking about all this.

[*She starts to weep again.*]

MRS. WENTZ (*moving back towards her*)

Well, now, don't start thinking about it; it only upsets you.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But it *is* fantastic, isn't it, Mabel, that I should be going out there today?

MRS. WENTZ

Well, you don't *have* to go out there, you know!

MRS. ESPENSHADE

But, I mean, that such a thing should be happening to me, after all these years. It's just incredible.

MRS. WENTZ (*laying her hand on her shoulder*)

But it's a wedding, Ollie—and you love it. And that's the real reason you're going out there.

MRS. ESPENSHADE (*looking away off*)

No, Mabel. I'm going because I feel that Paul would want me there. Because he did idealize me, Mabel, he really did.

MRS. WENTZ

I'm sure he did, darling, but we'd better get started.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

I remember the last time I talked to him he said he always seen me as a kind of symbol of romance.

MRS. WENTZ

Well, that's very pretty, dear.

MRS. ESPENSHADE

He said he saw me, standing in a maiden light— (*She drifts across in front of MRS. WENTZ, and the curtain starts to descend slowly. MABEL falls in after her, as she continues towards the archway, recalling the poem that PAUL recited to her.*)

Beyond the stealth of time, *and all alone*—

The secret quest of ev'ry errant knight,

Yet none may ever claim me as his own.

Oh, Wisdom's Child—how did'st thou learn that love  
Fulfilled is but the end thereof."

THE END OF THE PLAY





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